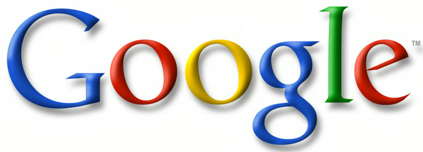

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

With the Author's Kind Regards.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

LADY MORGAN;

HER CAREER,

LITERARY AND PERSONAL,

WITH A GLIMPSE OF

HER FRIENDS, AND A WORD TO HER CALUMNIATORS.

BY

WILLIAM JOHN FITZPATRICK, J.P.

AUTHOR OF "LIFE, TIMES AND CONTEMPORARIES OF LORD CLONCURRY," "NOTES ON THE CORNWALLIS PAPERS," &c.

"What calls for vengeance but a woman's cause."—POPE.

LONDON:

CHARLES J. SKEET, PUBLISHER,

10, KING WILLIAM STREET,

CHARING CROSS.

1860.

Digitized by Google

LONDON:
Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street.

Digitized by Google

TO

MRS. EDWARD GEALE,

THE INHERITRESS OF MUCH FAMILY TALENT AND WORTH,

THE FOLLOWING MEMOIR

OF

HER DISTINGUISHED AUNT.

IS,

BY PERMISSION,

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

Digitized by Google

R. 166019

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

This Book has grown out of a publication of one hundred and forty pages which appeared, in September last, under the title of "The Friends, Foes, and Adventures of Lady Morgan." Such points in that work as seemed worthy of preservation have been embodied, with a mass of new matter, in the following pages. Notwithstanding that "The Friends, Foes, and Adventures of Lady Morgan" had many faults, it met with a favorable reception, both from the friends of her Ladyship, and from some of the leading literary organs—a circumstance which encouraged the author to endeavour to make it more worthy of the subject, and of the kind opinions expressed,* by devoting

* A few are subjoined by way of illustration.

The *Athenæum* in the course of a long Review, said, "Good and honest . . curious . . pleasant . . The writer has bestowed his heart not less than his industry upon his task . . A volume full of good things, and informed with a genuine love. We foresee a demand for the book at the libraries with the speedy issue of a new edition . . The most serious part of his labour is a reply to Croker's malignant articles. He answers Croker, not like Lady Morgan with airy banter and delightful mockery, but with solid fact. Mr. Fitzpatrick has given us a work to which we may refer all those who may be in search of

Digitized by Google

the entire of his leisure to a series of troublesome

some trustworthy information about 'Lady Morgan, her Friends, Foes and Adventures.'"

The *Literary Gazette* said: "It is not our intention to undertake the vindication of Lady Morgan's character, or to explain away her idiosyncracies, for that is sufficiently well done in this little volume . . Our readers will find a great deal of information touching the history of this very remarkable woman, as well as a great deal relating to her family and connections. The following extracts show so well the spirit of the writer, and are so full of eloquence, that we cannot resist the temptation of giving them."

Notes and Queries said: "Pleasant, genial, and gossiping, on that most brilliant of Ireland's daughters. The author has succeeded in throwing much new and interesting light upon Lady Morgan's early life and labours, and produced a book creditable to her memory and to his own talents. Mr. Fitzpatrick's valuable 'Note on the Cornwallis Papers' gave evidence of the store of curious materials for the literary and political history of Ireland which he has at his command; and the present volume encourages us to hope that we may soon be favoured with fresh evidence of his readiness and ability to make use of them."

The leading literary organs of Lady Morgan's native country, were still more flattering in their estimate. *The Daily Express*, a Conservative Journal, said: "The author has not placed his name upon the title-page; but we believe there is but one man in the United Kingdom who could have produced this work. The spirit of inquiry which exhausts every source of information—the intimate acquaintance with files of newspapers half a century old, with ancient almanacks and directories, and all sorts of contemporary records—the perseverance and the tact—the Catholic and Celtic sympathies combined with tolerant sentiments and enlarged views—the quiet humour—the genial spirit and racy style—the ardent love of literary biography inspired by intense nationality, all point to the author of the 'Note on the Cornwallis Papers,' and the 'Life and Times of Lord Cloncurry,' as the writer of the 'Friends, Foes, and Adventures of Lady Morgan.' A professed *littérateur* would make two splendid volumes out of these materials, and the published price would be a guinea. Mr. Fitzpatrick does not stop to beat out his gold into thin leaf; he collects the grains of the precious metal as diligently and eagerly as an Australian digger, and deals out his accumulated treasures as prodigally. The public, however, are the gainers, and we thank the learned and accomplished author."

The Dublin Telegraph, said; "Evidently the author of this

Digitized by Google

researches having for their object the increased interest, and authenticity of the Book.

"Lady Morgan, her Career, Literary and Personal," aspires to the rank of almost a perfectly new work; and it ought not, therefore, to be regarded as a mere Second Edition, honorable as that position undoubtedly is. Notwithstanding the adage which assures us that "there is nothing new under the sun," the author is not without hope that readers may be found who will recognise some novelty in these pages. Many of the documents now appear in print for the first time, and others, long forgotten, have been exhumed from repositories inaccessible to the general public.

A considerable amount of the information furnished, concerns, it may be observed, the early Life and Parentage of Lady Morgan. The following remark expressed by the "Athenæum" on May 7, 1859, may be said to have suggested this part of the task.

"So very little is known of Lady Morgan's early life—and so much debate has been held upon it in

work is the right man in the right place. He has dealt with a worthy subject in a worthy way, and in less than 150 pages has accumulated a mass of illustrative material, anecdotes, and social revelations which must have cost him a world of research. All this is put together in so lucid, fluent, and workmanlike a manner, as to leave a regretful feeling on the mind that he had not extended his volume into one of quadruple the size. Its author deserves the gratitude of every Irishman."

"Chivalrous and patriotic, complete and irresistible."—*Nation.*

"I rejoice," writes Mrs. S. C. Hall, "that an Irishman has been found with sufficient chivalry to stand by Lady Morgan's honoured grave, and plant there the Irish flag!"

Digitized by Google

the political aud literary squabbles of party men and women—that any light is welcome."

The first chapter is almost entirely devoted to a narrative of Robert Owenson's theatrical career, and to a picture of the Irish stage at the close of the last century.

It need not be feared that the present work will clash or interfere with a volume entitled "Passages from my Autobiography, by Sydney, Lady Morgan," but which is merely an amusing Diary, covering a period of less than nine months, *i. e.* from August 1818 to May 1819. From this Book I have not made a single extract but one. That "Lady Morgan, her Career, Literary and Personal" has been regarded as the reverse of intrusive, is sufficiently evident from the fact that her Ladyship's immediate relatives and literary executors have awarded to it their full meed of approbation.

The Author, in conclusion, has to beg the reader's indulgence, both for the delay which has arisen in the publication of the work, and for some traces of the absence of revision which he fears may exist in its pages. The revision of the proof sheets met with a serious interruption by a tedious illness, which had very nearly proved fatal to the author's own "*Career, Literary and Personal.*"

Kilmacud Manor, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin,
St. Patrick's Day (March 17) 1860.

Digitized by Google

LADY MORGAN,

HER CAREER,

LITERARY AND PERSONAL.

CHAPTER I.

A native of the Backs.—An Irish Hedge-School eighty years ago. —Mac Owen conforms.—Accepts the office of steward to a Mayo gentleman.—Prefers the Thespian art to Agriculture.— Stage-struck.—Dismissed from service.—A Dilemma.—Writes to Dr. Goldsmith.—The response and result.—Garrick.—The club in Gerrard Street.—Mac Owen a player, vocalist, and composer. —Attacked by the Theatrical Review.—"Mr. Owenson, from the Theatre Royal Covent Garden."—An Elopement and pursuit.—Tragedy abandoned as a bad job.—Birth of Sydney Owenson.—Honest Ned Lysaght.—"A Sprig of Shillalah."— Owenson's *débût* on the Dublin boards.—Becomes a theatric proprietor.—Thomas Ryder, lessee and player.—Richard Brinsley Sheridan.—Clytus and the Javelin.—Owenson's rolle of characters at Crow Street.—Kane O'Hara.—Owenson and Mrs. Jordan.—A bad pay.—Owenson becomes a wine merchant, but soon resumes the sock and buskin.—Dons female attire.—The Beggar's Opera publicly prohibited.—Daly and his Duels.

THE Backs is a district situate between Lough Conn, with its myriad islands crowned by castellated and monastic fragments, and the River Moy, or

Digitized by Google

Muadius, in the barony of Tirawley, and county of Mayo. Here, in the year of our Lord, 1744, Robert Mac Owen was born. He sprang from the old Milesian Irish family of Bally-Mac-Owen, in the county of Sligo, and belonged—as we have been informed by Doctor John O'Donovan—to the Hy-Fiachrach race. His father and mother were pious Catholics, who, in the face of strong temptations to the contrary, had clung, with singular fidelity, to the old faith throughout that long and gloomy night of persecution which succeeded the violation of the Treaty of Limerick. "Acts to Prevent the further Growth of Popery," were every day being passed, and seminaries for the education of the Catholic people did not exist even through connivance. A tolerably organized Hedge-School, moving from field to field, something on the principle of a flying camp, occasionally caught the eye of some zealous village loyalist, who, at the head of a few devoted followers, gave chase and dispersed it; but nothing of a more ambitious academic character was, for many years subsequently, suffered to flourish. At an early age, Robert Mac Owen was placed under the care of the Hedge-School master of the Backs, who, in the midst of blackberries and cowslips, taught his pupil how to read and write. The boy was an apt scholar, and gave pleasure, it is said, to the old Philomath. But Mac Owen's religious principles do not seem to have been as firmly rooted as his parents'. He saw and envied the swagger of conscious ascendancy and social superiority with which the Protestant portion of the population pursued the tenor of their way. He felt with humiliation his politically degraded condition; and unable to brook it longer, we find him repairing one fine morning to the Parish minister, who in front

Digitized by Google

of the Communion Table unlocked—not with "the Key of Heaven," but with "the Book of Common Prayer"—Mac Owen's chains, and set the helot politically free.

His emancipation, however, does not seem to have enabled him to grasp any of the good things of the state, for, a few years afterwards, we obtain a glimpse of Mac Owen discharging the unostentatious duties of steward to Sir John Browne, of Castle Margaret, county of Mayo. He filled this office not inefficiently, but gave, it is said, more time to reading and witnessing plays than altogether pleased his employer. To participate in the excitement and fun of the strolling dramatic exhibitions which, at that time, thronged Connaught, he frequently absented himself from the sphere of his jurisdiction at Castle Margaret. He became stage struck, and yearned for the London Boards. He began to cultivate the graces of elocution, and to cease cultivating land; he liked alliteration and recitation, was fonder of Shakspeare than of sheep-shearing, and thought more highly of the Haymarket and Covent Garden than of hay-making or gardening. Mac Owen, in short, began to neglect the duties of his office sadly, and more than once indignantly astonished Sir John Browne by passionately alluding to certain flocks upon the Grampian Hills to which the Baronet had no manner of claim. Every day confirmed Mac Owen more strongly in his theatrical tendencies. In intrepid defiance of the "pooh poohs!" and scowls of his agricultural friends, he openly preferred canvas scenery to the grand Mayo mountains, Croagh-Patrick, or Nephin; and pronounced a green curtain vastly superior, in point of attraction, to the green sward. Mac Owen was completely carried away by the fascinating excitement of his new vocation; he could think of

Digitized by Google

nothing else, until having one day assured Sir John Browne that his name was Norval, and that "to be or not to be was the question," the indignant Baronet visited Mac Owen with a summary dismissal from his service.

Mac Owen's emancipation from the cares of stewardship failed to fill him with very exuberant emotions. He had no money saved, and soon the grim realities of his position stalked unpleasantly before his imagination. Whither was he to turn in search of bread and happiness? A lucky thought at last occurred to him. What if, on the strength of a Connaught relationship with Dr. Oliver Goldsmith, he should write to that great man, and solicit his aid and counsel? With a trembling hand he posted a long letter, addressed to Dr. Goldsmith, "attick-story on the stair-case Inner Temple." A correspondence ensued. The friend of Johnson and Burke entered with thorough goodnature into the matter. He not only expressed a cordial willingness to assist Mac Owen in his theatrical project, but named a day and place for introducing him to David Garrick, then manager of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

A few circumstantial points enable us to fix the date of this transaction with tolerable proximity. In 1759, Goldsmith attacked Garrick with great virulence. Some years after, Goldsmith called upon Garrick to solicit his vote for an office to which the former aspired, but a resentful negative was the only reply.* In 1768 we find Goldsmith and Garrick still disunited by pique.† But in 1772 they are "on very friendly terms."‡ As Goldsmith's light was

* Forster's "Life and Times of Goldsmith," p. 141.

† Davies' "Memoirs of Garrick," v. ii. p. 154.

‡ Ibid, p. 159. This book, written in the year 1780, by one who knew Goldsmith well, contains not a few startling passages

Digitized by Google

finally quenched in 1774, it is reasonable to infer that Owenson's introduction to Garrick took place in or about the year 1771.

After the usual amount of negociation and preparation, Mac Owen at length got something to do on the boards, but Garrick did not consider his talents of sufficient calibre to hazard an appearance at Drury Lane. The veteran acter, we believe, gave him an introduction to a country manager of repute;* but as a preliminary step to attaining success, Garrick impressed upon Mac Owen the expediency of anglicising his cognomen into the softer orthography of Owenson.† "Would Macklin," said he, "have been as popular in England, had he not laid aside the broguish MacLoughlin of his fathers?" The hint was taken, and provincial playbills soon announced "first appearance of Mr. Owenson on any stage." The *débutant* had too much passion for a theatrical life to experience the slightest emotion of timidity or awkwardness. He flung himself, heart and soul, into every part which the stage manager allotted to him; and the result was that Owenson's engagement became a success. After some time he strengthened his popularity by calling a new accomplishment to his

illustrative of that great man's weaknesses. Chapter XLI. informs us that "the doctor was such a compound of absurdity, envy, and malice, contrasted with the opposite virtues of kindness, generosity, and benevolence, that he might be said to consist of two distinct souls, and to be influenced by the agency of a good and a bad spirit."

* The *Freeman's Journal* of May 28, 1812, states that Owenson came out "under the auspices of Garrick, to whom he was introduced by Dr. Goldsmith," but we cannot find any evidence of Owenson having made his *début* at Drury Lane.

† Innumerable entreaties were urged with a view to make Miss O'Neill change her name, but all to no effect, until Sir William Beecher, on December 18, 1819, succeeded in effecting the desideratum, by making her Lady Beecher.

Digitized by Google

aid. He took lessons in singing from Doctor Arne,* author of the opera of "Artaxerxes," and afterwards from Worgan,† the composer of the beautiful Easter Hymn "Hallejujah." They found Owenson an apt pupil, and urged him to cultivate the vocal taste, which he did with such effect, that our player not only mastered the science of singing, but became in a short time able to compose original airs, and to put new words and symphonies to old ones. Owenson is said to have been the author of many charming Irish airs—amongst others, "My Love's the Fairest Creature;" but we are assured by Samuel Lover that in the original Irish of *Shelv nha chonos haint*, it has so long existed that all trace of the original composer is lost. An anonymous writer has pronounced Owenson to have been "the author of the music, with original words, of the song now popular as 'Rory O'More,' and appropriated by Mr. Lover as his own," but Mr. Lover denies that he ever claimed as his own exclusive composition, that highly popular tune.

Owenson, at length, attained sufficient status to warrant his kind friend, Dr. Goldsmith, in introducing him to the famous Literary Club in Gerrard Street. A sketch of Lady Morgan attributed to her husband, and published in the "London and Dublin Magazine" thirty-four years ago, mentions this fact. A stronger evidence of Owenson's pleasant qualities of head and heart could not be cited. The select character of the Club was guarded with such jealous care, that it did not include more than twenty. Great fears were entertained lest Boswell should have been blackballed although proposed by Johnson. "If they had refused, Sir," he afterwards said to

* *Freeman's Journal*, Dublin, May 28th, 1812.
† Recollections of John O'Keefe, v. i. p. 355.

Digitized by Google

Bozzy, "they knew they'd never have got in another. I'd have kept them all out." Johnson, in proposing Boswell, used the right word to express his friend's merit, and in defiance of his own dictionary, called him "a clubable man." Gerrard Street was a gay place in those days. In this luxurious intellectual den Owenson for many an evening enjoyed Johnson's growl, Boswell's chuckle, Goldsmith's transparent vanities, and Burke's pun, roared through the speaking trumpet of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

In 1774, Owenson received through Garrick's influence an engagement at Covent Garden Theatre. It was said of Owenson, when sick of his agricultural life at Castle Margaret that he was "fonder of reading Rowe, than reaping rye;" and this old predilection for Rowe was now sustained by our player attempting at Covent Garden, the somewhat ambitious part of "Tamerlane," in Rowe's celebrated tragedy of that name. From some of the leading newspapers Owenson received praise both on the score of his commanding figure, and his marked histrionic passion; but the "Theatrical Review" ran counter to this generous tone of criticism, called him "a gawkey," and pronounced his assumption of the part of "Tamerlane," as a gross insult to common sense and good taste. Driven from London by this poisoned arrow, "Mr. Owenson from the Theatre Royal Covent Garden," proceeded to go the round of the provincial houses, starring it at some, and accepting very subordinate parts at others—until having made some noise at the Shrewsbury Theatre he took advantage of his temporary celebrity to make a proposal of marriage to the daughter of a respectable country gentleman named Hill, who resided in the neighbourhood of Shrewsbury.

Owenson is traditionally described as a man of

Digitized by Google

commanding stature and a persuasive tongue, who could break as many hearts with his blarney, as heads with his shillalah. Miss Jane Hill was rather *passée;* she had no objection to matrimony, and rather encouraged the advances of the stalwart young Irishman: but her parents, regarding the phrase "strolling player" as one of stinging reproach, indignantly resisted Mr. Owenson's suit. With a face of desperate resignation the player withdrew from Mr. Hill's house, "positively the last appearance *but one* of Mr. Owenson." The attachment was dying, as Mr. and Mrs. Hill thought, a natural death when Miss Jane—bathed in the silver light of an autumnal moon—suddenly appeared one night at her casement, and descended into two colossal arms below. In less time than it takes to record it, the devoted pair were flying along the banks of the Severn in quest of happiness and a parson. Like thorough historians we have explored the route that Owenson and his lady are believed to have taken. Lime trees of enormous altitude gothically over-arch the road for several miles along the banks of the river, and resemble an endless cathedral aisle. At Litchfield, Mr. and Mrs. Owenson were, we believe, married. The ceremony had happily concluded ere old Mr. Hill, teeming with perspiration, and foaming with rage, arrived to forbid the bans. Where the honeymoon was passed tradition does not state.

The tranquillity of matrimony failed to extinguish Owenson's theatric mania. He continued to act before provincial audiences, and became a favourite. His appearance told strongly in his favour; all accounts, traditional and documental, concur in assigning to Owenson a gallant, stalwart figure, a commanding aspect, Celtic features, with a gen-

Digitized by Google

tlemanly and prepossessing deportment. The attack of the 'Theatrical Review' had stung Owenson to the quick, but it did not nerve him to renewed exertion and stronger ambition; tragedy in general, and "Tamerlane" in particular, were abandoned as a bad job; and the lighter walks of comedy, and Irish drama, were now trod, with considerable success, by Mr. Owenson. His commanding figure and deportment were points which, as already observed, told well in his favour. "He was celebrated as an Irish comedian and vocalist," observes an octogenarian actor, "he understood the ancient language of the country, and in stature looked a true descendant of the Milesian race of heroes."*

Dramatic singers were scarce moreover; Incledon and Braham had not yet appeared before the public; and the lessons which Owenson had some years previously received from Worgan and Arne, were now turned to account. "His singing the Irish songs," wrote one who knew Owenson intimately, "being master of the Irish language, as also a perfect musician, as to voice, had great effect with the admirers of our national melody. His Major O'Flaherty, was a great favourite; but his prime character was Teague in the 'Committee, or the Faithful Irishman,' in which, wrapped in a blanket, and flourishing his great oaken cudgel, he sung an Irish planxty, perfect in language, style and action; all which rendered his benefits very substantial; Owenson sent me over this tune, and to it I wrote the Finale to the 'Poor Soldier.'"†

Owenson's great success in singing songs of this character, was doubtless attributable to the profound

* "Fifty Years of an Actor's Life," by W. A. Donaldson, 1858 Part I.

† Recollections of John O'Keefe, vol. i. p. 158.

Digitized by Google

acquaintance with the Irish tongue, which he necessarily formed during the long period of his sojourn in Connaught, where the vernacular language is spoken almost exclusively by the labouring classes. The first fruit of Robert Owenson's alliance with Jane Hill was the subject of these pages. The date of her birth has, for more than half a century, been a source of much literary controversy. The late John Wilson Croker instituted a formal commission, with a view to its discovery, but all to no effect. "The date of her birth" said the 'Athenæum' in recording her death "she would never tell, and the subject of the when and where provoked a long discussion on the part of that ancient Tory faction to which she was all her life so sharply opposed." Again on Sept. 10, following, the same journal noticed "Lady Morgan's skill in baffling even the most curiously and courteously veiled questions on the subject," and adds, "no subtlety of inquiry could entrap Lady Morgan into admission about her age."*

The date, however, can now be fixed with tolerable

* More than one amusing instance might be given to shew Lady Morgan's wish to clip at least twenty years off her actual age. In 1855, Mr. Fitzpatrick sent to Lady Morgan an old newspaper dated December 1807, containing an eminently creditable letter from her pen, believing that after the lapse of half a century, it would interest the veteran authoress to see it again. We transcribe an extract from her acknowledgment, because it exhibits the peculiarity alluded to, and, in the next place, records an early effort of her pen, little, if at all, known.

"Lady Morgan presents Mr. Fitzpatrick her compliments, and *best* thanks for the enclosure of her *early* (*very early !*) scrap of authorship, written when she but "*lisped in numbers.*" She has no recollection of the letter he has sent her, but she remembers writing something of the same kind on *behalf of the little sweeps of Dublin*, in her thirteenth year, which obtained notice from her friend '*The Freeman.*'"

Digitized by Google

accuracy. On April 24th, 1845, her sister, Lady Clarke died, at the age of sixty. That she was the junior of Lady Morgan by ten years is well-known to her family. Lady Morgan must, therefore, have been born in 1775. Her birth occurred on shipboard, so that no country can claim the honour of Lady Morgan's nativity; but as it took place when crossing the Irish Sea, she may fairly be called an Irish woman, even though her subsequent career had never been distinguished by those ennobling characteristics of nationality which have rendered the name of Lady Morgan so valued in Ireland.

Owenson was proud of his little daughter, and resolved to celebrate her christening with becoming festivity. Ned Lysaght, the once famous extempore Irish poet, was invited to attend the baptismal ceremony in the capacity of god-papa; and Ned, with characteristic good nature, at once accepted the responsibility. He and Owenson, as two very eminent boon companions, wits, poets, and singers of convivial songs, it may well be supposed that some rivalry existed between them; but it is pleasant to find that the old adage, "two of a trade never agree," was not, in this instance, verified. Lysaght, for many years after continued to regard the tiny child with a fatherly feeling of affection and pride; and when, in 1809, death snatched him away, she felt with bitter sorrow, her doubly orphaned position.

At what time the baptismal ceremony took place, it is not easy to determine. In the first edition of this work, we described it in immediate connection with the infancy of little Sydney. But an inferential conclusion inclines us to believe that Owenson delayed the performance of the rite until the child had been sufficiently advanced in religious knowledge " to

Digitized by Google

have the faith, and if need be, the repentance of the convert." This is the more likely, as Mrs. Owenson always made the Bible her sole guide and rule of faith; and she knew that no passage existed in the Scripture to justify infant baptism, although eccle siastical tradition—which Protestants reject—enforces its necessity. That the famous "Counsellor Lysaght" stood sponsor for little Sydney is certain, but it was not until 1788 that Lysaght became a member of the Irish Bar. Nor was he living in Dublin for several years previously. Sir Jonah Barrington mentions in his Sketches (iii. 321,) that he and Lysaght were at the Temple together in 1785.

Through the courtesy of the Rev. Dr. Tisdall, we have been enabled to search the parish registry of St. Andrew's Dublin,* but no record exists therein of the baptism of Sydney Owenson. The following entry, however, may be found under date of May 11th, 1783: "Robert Whitmore, son of Robert and Jane Owenson, baptised—John Hewitt, vicar." Sydney was the first, and for several years the only child. Robert came next; and in 1785, Olivia was born.

Sydney Owenson had begun making verses before she had left the nursery. In a poetic address to her only sister Olivia, afterwards Lady Clarke, our authoress plainly states this fact:

> Have I from childhood then, been writing,
> And ere I well could write, inditing,
> In scribbling ever still delighting;
> Since first the muse
> Did kindly string my infant lyre,
> And o'er my mind poetic fire
> As kind infuse;

At Sydney's premature development of bardic

* In 1777, Owenson resided at 3, Crow Street, Dublin; in 1794, at 60, Dame Street; in 1799, at 15, Trinity Street. These localities are all within the parish of St. Andrew.

Digitized by Google

genius, Lysaght's interest in his little god-daughter strengthened to intensity: and in the fulness of his delight the convivial councillor seized his pen and threw off the following characteristic fragment.—

> **The muses met me once not very sober,**
> **But full of frolic at your merry christening!**
> **And now, this twenty-third day of October,**
> **As they foretold, to your sweet lays I'm listening.**
>
> **They called you "Infant Muse," and said your lyre**
> **Should one day wake your nation's latent fire;**
> **They ordered Genius, garlands to entwine**
> **For Sidney;—Me, i'faith, they plied with wine."**

Lysaght was a perfect type of the Irish gentleman of the old school. Lavish of money, he found himself at the age of thirty-five, with little but his pen and his pedigree. Convivial, gay, of high and dauntless spirit, he held hair-triggers as often as hock-tumblers in his right hand. Fond of the pleasures of the table, he had also a taste for the terrors of the field. Though sometimes eager to resent, he was perhaps more often impatient to forgive. As a second, especially in political quarrels, Lysaght was constantly in requisition. Perhaps the most remarkable case was that of the Right Hon. George Ogle, who declared at a public dinner in Dublin, that "a papist would swallow a false oath as easily as he would a poached egg." Four shots having been interchanged without effect, Lysaght on behalf of the principal, who was a Catholic, compelled the Privy Councillor to write an apologetic explanation.

The sectarian prejudices of those days seem to have sadly warped the minds of men, otherwise expansive and generous. It is hard to understand how the accomplished writer of "Banna's Banks," and "Molly Asthore," could give utterance to a sentiment so coarse and narrow-minded.

Lysaght wrote a great number of stirring songs,

Digitized by Google

racy of the soil. "Donnybrook Fair,"* "The Rakes of Mallow," and "We love the man who led the van of Irish volunteers," may be cited as examples.

In politics Lysaght had unfortunately no fixed principle. A patriot to-day and a courtier to-morrow, he would fling awkward squibs at the feet of royalty now, and the next minute hurl a disconcerting cracker into the ranks of the popular party. He ridiculed the opponents of the Union with his pen, and according to Sir Jonah Barrington, received cash in acknowledgment from Lord Castlereagh. Dr. Madden tells us that he was a sworn "united Irishman." Lysaght attempted to practice at the

* Since the appearance of the first edition of this work, we received a letter from a member of the Royal Irish Academy, claiming for the late Mr. H. B. Code, proprietor of *The Warder* newspaper, the authorship of the well-known national song of "Donnybrook Fair." Our correspondent has always understood Mr. Code to be the writer, but never heard him absolutely avow the fact. As a specimen of Mr. Code's facility in versification, he quotes the following, which was thrown off in about a hundred seconds. On coming down to breakfast one morning, Mr. Code found on the floor a bracelet which a lady had dropped; and he instantly sent it into her room with his compliments and impromptu—

Stray bracelet of the heedless fair,
Why leave that beauteous arm bare?
Thou silly thing, were I but thee,
I'd cling there to eternity.
And through the veins round which I dwell
Infuse my passion to her soul,
And cling thereto with life and breath,
Till hook and eye were loosed in death.

Sir Jonah Barrington's "Personal Sketches," vol. ii. p. 231, was our authority for the statement that Lysaght wrote the song of "Donnybrook Fair," but Barrington is not infallible, for, he also attributes to Lysaght, (v. iii. p. 320). "Green were the fields where our forefathers dwelt, O," whereas the real author was George Nugent Reynolds. Samuel Lover, in his "Lyrics of Ireland," (139) has given "Donnybrook Fair," with Lysaght's name,

Digitized by Google

English Bar, but after a short experience declared that he had not law enough for the King's Bench, and was not dull enough for the Court of Chancery, and that before he could succeed at the Old Bailey, he must shoot Garrow which would be extremely disagreeable to him.

Robert Owenson selected the name of Sydney for his little daughter in fond recollection of the benevolent rule of Sir Henry Sidney, who in his capacity of Lord Deputy, visited Connaught in 1575, and showed protection to many of the Irish exiles.

That old Mr. Hill became, after a while, reconciled to the marriage of his daughter with Owenson, is evident, for in the year 1777 we find the latter purchasing a share in Crow Street Theatre, with a portion of his wife's dower, and becoming joint proprietor with Thomas Ryder.* Hitchcock, speaking of this remarkable performer, in 1794, observes that he was ever distinguished by the versatility as well as excellence of his genius, and that so far back as 1770, Ryder might be deemed a theatrical Atlas, who at that time, and for many years after, supported, almost unaided, the heavy burthen of the Irish drama. "It might be truly said," adds Hitchcock, "that for a period of twelve years he was almost every night before the public." Ryder was originally manager of Smock Alley Theatre,

but evidently on the authority of Sir Jonah Barrington. The same remark applies to D. O. Maddyn's observation in the "Revelations of Ireland," p. 12.

* We gather this fact from a memoir of Lady Morgan, contributed to "The London and Dublin Magazine," for 1826. The details came from Lady Morgan herself, and the Editor's impression is that they were thrown into literary shape by Sir Charles Morgan, who constantly wrote for that Magazine, and received as pay £10 per sheet. The article in question, mentions that "on Mr. Owenson's marriage with a respectable Englishwoman, he purchased a share in one of the Dublin theatres, and became joint proprietor with the celebrated Mr. Ryder."

Digitized by Google

which opened under his auspices in September 1772. He was the first Patentee who admitted ladies into the pit—a privilege which had previously been denied.* It was not, however, until April, 1773, that the landlord, the Reverend Dr. Wilson of Trinity College, drew up a deed letting the theatre to Ryder for the term of his life at the annual rent of £365. In 1776, Ryder took a lease of Crow Street Theatre while retaining possession of Smock Alley House to prevent opposition.†

In the *Freeman's Journal* of October 19th 1776, we have traced, after a long and laborious search, the first appearance of Owenson in Dublin. "On Monday next," observes the advertisement, "at the Theatre Royal Crow Street, there will be presented a comedy called 'The West Indian.'—Major O'Flaherty (with a song) Mr. Owenson from the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden, being his first appearance in this kingdom." Two very acute dramatic critics wrote in the *Freeman's Journal* at this period under the respective signatures of "A Theatrical Spy," and "Dramatic Censor." The latter in an article dated October 22nd, 1776, has placed on record the following shrewd and interesting notice of Owenson's *débût* in Dublin. "The character of Major O'Flaherty was performed with great spirit and propriety by Mr. Owenson. His figure is perfectly well adapted, his brogue was characteristic, and not too vulgar; but his countenance did not appear old enough for a man who had seen thirty years hard service. The song he sang was taken from Mr. Mc Dermott's opera of 'The Milesian,' and was received with great applause though rather abruptly introduced. This gentleman will forgive me, if I hint,

* Hitchcock's "View of the Irish Stage," v. ii. p. 293—Dublin 1794.

† Gilbert's "History of Dublin," v. ii. pp. 104-7.

Digitized by Google

that although it is perfectly natural in a man when his mind is strongly agitated, to express its overflowings in its own native language, even when talking to people in an acquired one, yet his uttering phrases in Irish so very frequently, seemed rather a local compliment than a judicious use of them, and might by some be construed into a clap trap. Let him ask himself would he use so many if performing the same character in England? The answer will justify this remark."* The "Theatrical Critic" thought Owenson too young for the character of Major O'Flaherty. A writer of vast dramatic experience, however, has said that "an old man acted well by a young one is truly entertaining, but performed by a real old man is lamentable, and not to be borne."†

We have our suspicions as to whose pen threw off the flowing and acute theatrical criticisms in the 'Freeman's Journal,' eighty-five years ago, under the signatures of the "Dramatic Censor," and "Theatric Spy." Moore, in the third chapter of his "Memoirs of R. B. Sheridan," observes, in noticing the events of the year 1775, that Sheridan wrote numerous "essays for the newspapers," and adds: "There are also among his manuscripts some commencements of periodical papers, under various names, 'The Detector,' 'The Dramatic Censor, &c.'" Is it not likely that Sheridan may have thrown an occasional paper into the leading literary organ of his native city? It is worthy of notice that Thomas Sheridan, his father, was performing on the Dublin boards in 1777.‡

* *Freeman's Journal*, Dublin, October 19, 1776.

† Tate Wilkinson's Memoirs, v. ii. p. 127.

‡ Gilbert's "History of Dublin," p. 198, vol. ii. Old Sheridan was a tragedian of great eminence and prodigious solemnity. "I recollect him particularly," says Sir Jonah Barrington, "playing '*Alexander the Great*,' and throwing the

Digitized by Google

The parts which Owenson performed at Crow Street during the remainder of the season of 1776 may be rapidly traced and followed. On Nov. 5th, we find him playing Lysimachus, in Lee's tragedy of "Alexander the Great." This play was produced at Crow Street, with a good deal of startling mechanical contrivance and effect, in order to eclipse Mossop's grand spectacle of "Coriolanus" at Smock Alley. Alexander's beautiful chariot was drawn from the extreme end of the stage by unarmed soldiery. "In a twinkling," writes O'Keefe, "it disappeared, and every soldier was, at the instant, armed. Each man, having his particular duty previously assigned to him, laid his hand on different parts of the chariot; one took a wheel—this was a shield—all in a moment wore shields; the axle-tree was taken by another—it was a spear; the body of the chariot flew to pieces, and the whole was converted into swords, javelins, lances, standards, &c. Each soldier, thus armed, arranged himself at the sides, and Alexander, standing in the centre, began his speech."

javelin at Clytus, whom happening to miss, he hit the cup-bearer then played by one of the hack performers, a Mr. Jemmy Fottrel. Jemmy very naturally supposed that he was hit designedly, and that it was some new light of the great Mr. Sheridan, to slay the cup-bearer in preference to his friend Clytus, which certainly would have been a less unjustifiable murder, and that he ought to tumble down, and make a painful end, according to dramatic custom time immemorial. Immediately, therefore, on being struck, Mr. James Fottrel, (who was the ugliest cup-bearer ever employed by any monarch) reeled, staggered, and fell, very naturally, considering it was his first death; but being determined on this unexpected opportunity to make an impression upon the audience, when he found himself stretched on the boards at full length, he began to roll about, kick, and flap the stage with his hands most immoderately, and at length expired, with a groan so long and so loud, that it paralysed even the people in the galleries, whilst the ladies, believing that he was really killed, cried aloud. Though then very young, I was myself so terrified that I shall never forget it."

Digitized by Google

The part of Lysimachus was not Owenson's forte. He appeared to better advantage in such light musical pieces as Bickerstaff's "Maid of the Mill;" and on November 14th 1776, may be found a favourable notice from the "Dramatic Censor," of Owenson's acting of Mervyn in that piece.

Thomas Moore tells us that in consequence of the bad acting of Lee as Sir Lucius O'Trigger, the famous comedy of "The Rivals" failed on its first representation in 1775.* In Ireland the play became intensely popular, and it is no extravagant flight of imagination to conjecture that Owenson's personation of the belligerent Irish Baronet contributed in no small degree to the success of the piece. On November 21st, 1776, "The Rivals" is announced for representation at Crow Street Theatre, with the part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger by Mr. Owenson. This character was a decided hit of Owenson's. Lady Morgan, in a conversation with Mr. Cole, formerly lessee of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, particularly alluded to her father's happy execution of the part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger.† "The Rivals" had a run of many nights at Crow Street. No new character is undertaken by Owenson until December 28, 1776, when he appeared as Marciar in Lee's "Theodosius, or the Force of Love."

His next part is Mr. Heapy in "The Siege of Harlech," January 20th, 1777; Foigard in "The Beaux Strategem," January 21st; The Irishman in "The Double Valet," January 28th; Phocian in "The Grecian Daughter," February 17th; Vernon in "Henry IV," February 25th; Conolly in "The School for Wives," February 28th; Merlin in "Cymon," March 11th; and on the 15th of that

* Memoirs of R. B. Sheridan, chap. iii. p. 65.

† Letter from J. W. Cole, Esq., Nov. 16th, 1859.

Digitized by Google

month by command of his Excellency John, Earl of Buckingham, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, was produced "the most tragical tragedy that ever was tragedized by any company of tragedians, called Chrononhotonthologos—*Rigdom Funidos,* Mr. Ryder; *King of the Fiddlers,* Mr. O'Keefe; *Cupid,* Mr. Owenson."

On March 31st, 1777, was performed the prelude of "New Brooms."—Phelim O'Flaherty, "with a song in character," Mr. Owenson; after which the Pantomime of "Harlequin in the Moon," *Wizard,* Mr. Owenson. On April 1st he appeared as Tom Tug, the Waterman, in Dibdin's musical entertainment of that name; and on April the 3rd (a command night) as Pan in O'Hara's "Midas," and Octavio in "The Governess." A letter from Kane O'Hara, recently published by Mr. Gilbert particularly refers to this evening. The letter bears date 4th April 1777, and is addressed to the musical manager at Crow Street. This was the first representation of "Midas," on the Dublin Boards, and O'Hara seems to have been exceedingly apprehensive lest the performers should "alter, or add, or omit any word or note in air or recitative." O'Hara adds, "I purpose to be present at every representation, accompanied by some friends, who will take their cue of clapping or hissing from me; and you may assure the company, that any deviation on their part will be reprimanded in the most marked mode of disapprobation." O'Hara, in this letter, assigned to Owenson the part of Pan with various new songs, including "Pox on your pother about this or that." It is impossible to regard this act as otherwise than complimentary to Owenson. Pan would seem to have been O'Hara's favourite part, for, as we are

Digitized by Google

assured, it was reserved by the author for himself on the first representation of "Midas."*

In the part of Pan, Owenson made no ephemeral hit, but acquired a permanent and substantial fame. A writer in 1820 informs us that "Owenson was the favourite Pan of the Irish stage, and performed it with great applause so late as 1807.†

Owenson's new characters from the fourth to the twelfth of April were True Blue in "The Press Gang, or, the Parting Lovers;" Captain O'Cutter in Colman's Comedy of "The Jealous Wife;" Eustace in "Love in a Village;" The Shepherd, in "Maid of the Oaks;" and Remenes in "Artaxerxes." On the 13th, "The Shamrock, or, St. Patrick's Day," was produced, "with a grand pageant and procession of kings of Leinster, Munster, and Connaught; Strongbow, de Courcy, Sitric the Dane, each attended with their respective arms, ensignia, and appendages; Hibernia in a triumphal car, Druids, Bards, Games, Banshees, Leprachauns, Hibernians in their original state; Peace, Fame, Hospitality, Industry, &c. To conclude with a song by Carolan the ancient Irish Bard (Mr. Owenson), and grand chorus by all the characters."

Dorothy Bland, *alias*, Francis, a young and pretty Waterford girl, widely known by her subsequently assumed name of Mrs. Jordan, and her connection with an occupant of the British throne, made her *début* at Crow Street Theatre during the year 1777, as Phœbe in "As you like it," Owenson acting the part of Oliver in the same piece. Miss Bland's pleasant artlessness and sportive simplicity soon gained for her many admirers. "Joyous,

* The Private Theatre of Kilkenny and other private theatres in Ireland.—"Fifty copies only printed," 1825, p. 2.

† Remarks prefixed to 'Midas' in Cumberland's British Theatre.

Digitized by Google

animated, and droll" writes Sir Jonah Barrington, "her laugh arose from her heart, her tear started ingenuously from her feeling." "Her face, her tone, her manner," says Hazlitt, "were irresistible; her smile had the effect of sunshine, and her laugh did one good to hear it." Nature was her sole instructress. "Had I studied my positions, weighed my words, and measured my sentences," said Mrs. Jordan herself, "I should have been artificial, and they might have hissed me; so when I got the words by heart, I told Nature I was then at her service to do whatever she thought proper with my feet, legs, hands, arms, and features, to her I left the whole matter. I became her puppet, and never interfered further myself in the business. I heard the audience laugh at me, and I laughed at myself; they laughed again, so did I."

Mr. Doyne, a young military officer with plain features, and small means, fell desperately in love with Phœbe, and pursued her everywhere with declarations of the passion which almost broke his heart. He proposed to make Dorothea Francis his wife; but Owenson, who took a strong interest in the gradually developing dramatic genius of this young and interesting little girl, urged her mother to reject Lieutenant Doyne's addresses;* advice which it seems was thankfully received and promptly acted on.† Opinions will differ as to whether Owenson was right or wrong in this proceeding. As the wife of the plain and poor Lieutenant, Dorothea Francis might have been happier than the separated companion of a royal personage with a retiring allowance of £4,400 a year. Overwhelmed by afflictions, and in a state of extreme mental misery, she who had

* Personal Sketches, by Sir Jonah Barrington, v. ii. p. 219.
† Boaden's "Memoirs of Mrs. Jordan," vol. i., p. 14.

Digitized by Google

once rioted in her fine animal spirits, died July 3rd, 1816.

But to resume our examination of the parts which Owenson played during his first season on the Dublin boards. On April 19, 1777, he appears as Mercury in O'Hara's burletta of "The Golden Pippin;" on May 5th (a command night) as Conolly in "The School for Wives;" and on the 3rd as Harman in "Lionel and Clarissa." Owenson's benefit took place a few evenings subsequently, on which occasion was produced "a Prelude, with a new prologue in the character of an Irishman," and the comedy of "The Twin Rivals, Teague (with songs) Mr. Owenson. Between the play and farce," continues the original advertisement "an occasional Musical Medley Epilogue (written by the author of 'Tristram Shandy') will be sung by Mr. Owenson, of whom tickets may be procured at No. 3, Crow Street."

On the 8th May, 1777, the Viceroy gave another "command night," when Reid's farce of "The Registry Office," was performed with applause by Owenson and Ryder. But Owenson's great hit of the season was Phelim O'Flanagan in the Prelude, "in which," says the advertisement on May 9th, 1777, "will be introduced some favourite Italian and Irish songs, particularly Carolan's 'Receipt for Drinking' in Irish, and 'Ple Raca na Ruarka,' in English and Irish, the Irish by Carolan, the translation by Dean Swift."

> "O'Ruarc's noble feast will ne'er be forgot,
> By those who were there, and by those who were not."

This performance became infinitely popular; and met with endless *encores*.

Cumberland's comic opera of "The Summer's

Digitized by Google

Tale" was brought forward on May 10th, Owenson acting the part of Frederick. Three evenings later we find "the Dragon of Wantley" announced, with the part of the Dragon, of course, by Owenson. This performance had a run until the 24th when Owenson was again called upon to display his operatic powers in the pleasant burletta of "The Governess:" "The dresses entirely new," says the advertisement, "to conclude with a grand masquerade, illuminated by seven hundred lamps, and a Cotillion dance by Characters." A new burlesque satire, called "The Rehearsal, or a Lick at the Modern Drama," in which Owenson was to take a prominent part, had long been advertised for the 26th May. The author, moreover, circulated an appeal to the public, which, as furnishing an illustration of some extinct theatrical customs, we subjoin: "The author of the new rehearsal, relying on the candour of the public, on which alone he founds his hope of success, begs leave to request their patronage for his comedy. And as it is quite unusual for an author to have the profit of the first representation of a new piece, he assures them this innovation in his favour arises entirely from the condescension of Mr. Ryder, who, reflecting that the benefits and other course of business prevented the appearance of this comedy till so late in the season, with a generosity hitherto unparalleled by any manager of his own nation, and unsolicited, offered to give the first night to the author; for which he thinks himself bound, in justice and gratitude to return his thanks in the most public manner. In regard to the merits of the piece, the author cannot presume to decide; but respectfully leaves the determination to the judicious public, fully satisfied that it shall stand or fall by their suffrages. He will only add that if satire, free

Digitized by Google

from personality, an attempt to restore humour to modern comedy, a great variety of character, and a diligent attention to nature can please, he is not without hope of obtaining the approbation of the audience, the ultimate end of his wishes, and the best reward of his endeavours."

The Viceroy would seem to have been pleased with the acting of Owenson and his colleagues, for on June 3rd, we find the announcement of another performance by command. Owenson, Ryder, and Miss Francis, played on this occasion in "As you like it." The tragedy of "Zenobia," and Milton's Masque of "Comus," were, a few evenings later produced, Owenson playing Zopoirn in the first piece, and a Bacchanal in the other. The benefit of his musical preceptor, Dr. Arne, was announced on 21st June, when Owenson appeared as Mervin in "The Maid of the Mill," and Leander in the "Padlock."

"When the audiences of Smock Alley were beginning to flag," writes Sir Jonah Barrington, "Old Sparkes told Ryder, if he would bring out the afterpiece of 'The Padlock,' and permit him to manage it, he would ensure him a succession of good nights. Ryder gave him his way, and the bills announced a first appearance in the part of Leonora: the *débutante* was reported to be a Spanish lady. The public curiosity was excited, and youth, beauty, and tremulous modesty were all anticipated; the house overflowed; impatience was unbounded; the play ended in confusion, and the overture of 'The Padlock,' was received with rapture. Leonora at length appeared; the clapping was like thunder, to give courage to the *débutante*, who had a handsome face, and was very beautifully dressed as a Spanish donna, which it was supposed she really was. Her gigantic size, it is true, rather astonished the audience. How-

Digitized by Google

ever, they willingly took for granted that the Spaniards were an immense people, and it was observed that England must have had a great escape of the Spanish Armada, if the men were proportionably gigantic to the ladies. Her voice too was rather of the hoarsest, but that was accounted for by the sudden change of climate: at last, Leonora began her song of 'Sweet Robin'—

> Say, little foolish fluttering thing,
> Whither, ah! whither would you wing?

and at the same moment Leonora's mask falling off, old Sparkes stood confessed, with an immense gander which he brought from under his cloak, and which he had trained to stand on his hand and screech to his voice, and in chorus with himself. The whim took: the roar of laughter was quite inconceivable: he had also got Mungo played by a *real* black: and the whole was so extravagantly ludicrous, and so entirely to the taste of the Irish galleries at that time, that his 'Sweet Robin' was encored, and the frequent repetition of the piece replenished poor Ryder's treasury for the residue of the season."

The galleries, or rather the Gods who occupied them, do not seem to have contented themselves in those days, by merely hissing whenever any circumstance occurred below to cross their divine will. An advertisement from Ryder, dated July 1st, 1777, offers a "reward of ten guineas for the person who flung the quart bottle from the upper gallery upon the stage." There were no police in those days to keep order, and no surveillance of any description existed in the house, with the exception of two soldiers with fixed bayonets, who always "stood like statues on each side of the stage." The orchestra was often visited with vengeance from on

Digitized by Google

high; and Hitchcock assures us that impelled by the motives of self-preservation, the musicians were not unfrequently obliged to play behind the scenes.

We have referred to Ryder's falling fortunes. Being at last unable to discharge an arrear of rent which had accumulated on Smock Alley Theatre, he was obliged to surrender the House to Richard Daly, who in October, 1781, opened it with the engagement of John Philip Kemble at £5 per week. Ryder continued patentee and manager of Crow Street; but the formidable rivalry of Smock Alley soon reduced him to great embarrassment. On one occasion at Crow Street, when the play was by command of the Lord-Lieutenant, the actors came forward and announced that the company, having been for some time unpaid, would not perform. The manager, then confined to his room from severe illness, advertised that he would appear on the stage and state his case to the public. When Ryder came forward, his appearance was so ghastly that the audience called the prompter to bring him a chair, seated on which he read various documents to show that the most clamorous performers were those who in reality had the least cause of complaint. Robert Owenson made an effort to answer Ryder, but the audience would not listen to him.* In 1782 Ryder became bankrupt.

For several years previous, the actors, in truth, had been most irregularly paid, and many strange expedients are recorded to which they resorted in order to compel the manager to pay up arrears. John O'Keefe informs us that one night when the then lessee as King Lear was supported in the arms of an actor who played Kent, the latter in a whisper said, "If you

* Gilbert's "History of Dublin," v. ii. p. 204.

Digitized by Google

don't give me your honour, sir, that you'll pay me this night, I'll let you drop about the boards." The monarch alarmed, said, "Don't talk to me now." "I will," said Kent, "I'll let you drop." The promise was at length given, and Kent got his money.* Tate Wilkinson, speaking of Mossop, the manager to whom O'Keefe alludes, says that whenever he got a full house, instead of paying his performers, he flew to a gambling house, "and always returned home with an aching head and heart; but his guineas, with debts of honour, were always left behind." Wilkinson describes Mrs. Brandon, the acting star, flinging herself at the pompous manager's feet, and imploring, for God's sake to give her something, as she was actually starving. *Mossop.*—"Woman, you have £5 per week." *Mrs. Brandon.*—"I have been in Dublin six months, and in all that time have only received £6." *Mossop.*—"Woman, begone! If you dare ask me for money again, I will forfeit you £10."†

Owenson, it will be remembered, had formed a partnership with Ryder. It is not very likely that this connection had the effect of increasing the pecuninary means of our quondam land-steward, or that old Mr. Hill rejoiced in it as an eligible investment. Owenson now tried his fortune at commercial speculations, and became a wine merchant;‡ but he soon got tired of this plodding craft, and abandoned sherry for Sheridan, and rum for Rowe. Mr. Donaldson, in his recently published, "Fifty years of an Actor's Life," tells us that "Owenson on the occasion of a benefit. selected the 'Beggar's Opera,' and personated Polly Peachum. Capt. Macheath, was represented by a lady

* Recollections of John O'Keefe, v. i. p. 158.

† Autobiography of Tate Wilkinson, Dublin, 1791, v. ii. p. 211-12.

‡ London and Dublin Magazine, for January 1826.

Digitized by Google

of very short stature, and as Owenson was six feet one, 'he looked a mile in length, and she like a mile-stone.' In the business of the piece, when the Captain kisses his darling Polly, it was obliged to be reversed. Instead of the Captain saluting her, Owenson as Miss Peachum, lifted up the bold outlaw, and gave such a smack as made the theatre ring again with laughter and applause."

Mr. Donaldson seems to think that this transposition of the sexes was a freak or whimsey adopted by Owenson in the exuberance of a benefit night. The idea was not Owenson's nor the play Gay's properly so called. In the "Memoirs of John Banister," we are told that the paramount whim and captivating absurdity of the dramatic season of 1781, was the "Beggar's Opera Travestie," with all the characters metamorphosed. This folly was introduced by a prelude which tendered a grave apology to the audience for a delay in beginning the performance as Polly was only half shaved. The entire proceeding was marked by a coarseness which, at the present day, would not be tolerated for a moment. We learn, for example, that a point which never failed to tell, was when Mrs. Peachum swinging too heedlessly on her chair, exhibited a pair of black plush breeches under her petticoats. That the entire play was a monstrous burlesque on Gay's opera is proved by the mere fact of assigning to a man of Owenson's immense muscular frame, the part of Polly who, as a gentle, confiding, and affectionate girl, in the midst of a crew of dissolute ruffians, was obviously intended by Gay to enlist the sympathies and interest of the audience. Owenson's dress in the character of Polly, was a tightly laced dress of muslin, with a capacious hoop. The depth of his Caliban roar when Peachum pinches his daughter to

Digitized by Google

make her confess, was hardly less ludicrous in its effect than when singing, "Fondly let me loll," he hardly knew on what part of Captain Macheath's diminutive person to accommodate himself. In 1793, as we are reminded by Michael Kelly in his "Reminiscences," the Irish Government prohibited the Beggar's Opera from being acted.

In a little poem entitled "Retrospection," printed sixty years ago, Miss Owenson has furnished us with a glimpse of that home wherein her infant years were passed. Owenson's was a happy circle until chilled by death and poverty.

Oft does my mem'ry sketch the social group,
  At closing eve, that circled round the fire;
Sweet hour that fondly knits each human tie,
  Unites the children, mother, friend, and sire!

Full oft the legendary tale went round,
  Historic truth, or Car'lan's heart-felt song;
For though but little understood, I ween
  We lov'd the music of our native tongue!

And oft went round the puzzling, forfeit game,
  Play'd with nice art, and many a sportive jest;
Repeated oft—yet sure to win a laugh,
  For those we longest know, we lov'd the best!

Dear happy group, and e'en as happy good,
  While guileless spirits from each other torn!
Why has the world unclasp'd thy social bond,
  And left my heart its fond hope's wreck to mourn?

Thus calmly flows some pure, expansive stream,
  Pellucid, clear, while o'er its surface plays
The soften'd shade of each o'er-drooping plant,
  The moon's pale beam, or sun's meridian rays!

But lo! should earth's convulsive struggles throw
  Th' impending rock in scattered masses o'er,
'Tis forced to disunite in sep'rate streams,
  Dwindles to viewless rills, and 's seen no more!

Digitized by Google

About the year 1782, Owenson was engaged by Daly, under whose direction he continued to perform until 1785, when they quarrelled and separated. It would be tedious to trace Owenson through every part during this interval. In the year 1784, we find him at Smock Alley Theatre, performing such characters as Murtagh Mullowney, in a then popular pantomimic entertainment; Cacafogo, in "Rule a Wife, and have a Wife," and the Undertaker, in O'Keefe's opera of "The Dead Alive." Daly and Ryder, by both acting on the same boards, at this period, and thus consolidating their strength, rendered Smock Alley a place of great fame and popularity.

Richard Daly was a Galway gentleman of good family. He received his education in Trinity College, Dublin, and with a view to the Bar became a Templar. "He had the greatest predilection for single combat," says Barrington, "of any person I ever recollect. He had fought sixteen duels in the space of two years—three with swords, and thirteen with pistols." Having challenged Sir Jonah Barrington to deadly combat, Daly appeared on the ground dressed in a pea green coat, a large tucker with a diamond brooch, a three cocked hat with a gold button-loop and tassels, silk stockings, and a *couteau de chasse* dangling from his thigh.

Ryder, originally a printer, survived until 1791, when we find his death announced with great sorrow by the "Dublin Chronicle." This event took place at Sandymount, near Dublin, on November 26th. That Ryder's brilliant theatric reputation was not merely local is obvious from the cluster of complimentary paragraphs which appeared in the English Press. "No man," observes the 'Gentleman's Magazine' of the day, "no man understood human

Digitized by Google

nature better: this was his cue in the delineation of human character. More versatility of genius seldom fell to any man. He could sustain with credit every situation of the drama. Whether the strings of the heart were by sympathy to flush the face with pleasure, or to contort with grief—whether the frank lover, or the artful hypocrite was to appear, whether the soul was to melt into pathos, or to kindle in hilarity, he was all in all." Ryder is buried in the churchyard of Drumcondra, within a stone's throw of the old school-house in which Sydney Owenson was educated. A large concourse of persons accompanied his remains to the grave.

The site of the once famous Smock Alley Theatre, is now occupied by the Roman Catholic Church of SS. Michael and John. Most of the stones used in the latter erection were those of the old theatre. The altar of expiation stands on the site of that stage which so often exhibited inflammatory scenes of licentiousness, and the pit of the theatre is now a gloomy vault filled with mouldering dead!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

Owenson on the staff of Mrs. Billington's admirers.—Her history. —Smock Alley Theatre.—Owenson a Manager.—"The Musick Hall in Fishamble Street."—Reconciliation with Daly.—Birth of Olivia Owenson.—Cumberland and his Major O'Flaherty.—Owenson's patronage of Dermody.—His History.—Sydney Owenson alleged to have been on the stage.—Sent to School. —Death of Mrs. Owenson.—Sydney's Lines to her mother's memory.—A Model Widower.—Owenson threatens to throw an arm full of Ensigns out of window.—Friar Tuck, Counsellor Flummery, Sergeant Jack, and Captain O'Cutter.—George Colman.—The Sham Squire.—Owenson hires the Derry playhouse.—Peep o' Day Boys.—Connaught.—The Duke of Wellington flogged.—Samuel Whyte.—A Cork audience.—Letter from Miss Owenson to her father.—A sudden death.

We have said that Owenson, after his theatrical losses at Smock Alley, continued but for a short time only to devote his thought and time to the mercantile pursuits in which he had been urged by his friends to embark. The same stage-struck restlessness that had characterised his stewardship at Castle Margaret again distracted Owenson's mind, and rendered him utterly unfit for business. It may well be imagined that this theatrical passion was not weakened by an imprudent connection which he had formed with an actress of great beauty and celebrity, who had just made her *débût* upon the Dublin boards.*

* In the sketch of Lady Morgan (attributed to Sir Charles) and published in the 'London and Dublin Magazine' for 1826,

Digitized by Google

The name of the lady was not mentioned in the first edition of this work, but a leading literary organ,* having, in a kind critical notice of it, expressed some curiosity on the subject, I may observe, on the authority of J. W. Cole, Esq., formerly lessee of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, that "the actress of celebrity" was no other than Mrs. Elizabeth Billington, *née* Weichsell—a fact which my obliging informant heard from Lady Morgan herself. At an early age, she had become the pupil, and soon after the wife of a composer and performer on the double bass, named Billington, whom she accompanied to Dublin where her *débût* was made, says the Thespian Dictionary, "in the opera of 'Orpheus and Euridice.'"

This, however, was not Mrs. Billington's first appearance. By referring to the papers of the day, it may be found that on February 13th, 1784, she sung "By particular desire, and for that night only, the song of 'Sweet Echo,' accompanied on the violin by Master Weichsell, conductor of the band." On March 4th, 1784, "His Majesty's Servants" performed at Smock Alley "Orpheus and Euridice, in imitation of the ancient Greek Theatrical Feasts—The Shade of a Departed Hero—Mr. Owenson; Euridice—Mrs. Billington, her *third appearance* in this kingdom."

"The Shade of a Departed Hero," would seem to have made a very prompt and fatal impression upon the heart and principles of Mrs. Billington. Ere the newly married couple had been three weeks in Dublin, circumstances transpired which led to a complete rupture between them. In "Faulkner's

Owenson's "imprudent connection with a once beautiful and celebrated actress," is incidentally alluded to.

* "Athenæum," September 10 1859.

Digitized by Google

Dublin Journal" of March 9th, 1784, we read the following manifesto:

"A Caution to the Public.—Notice is hereby given to all persons not to credit or trust Elizabeth Billington (formerly Weichsell) the wife of me, James Billington, as I am determined not to pay any debts she may contract on any account whatever; witness my hand, Dublin, March 4th, 1784.—JAMES BILLINGTON."

Immediately after, the names of Owenson and Mrs. Billington disappear from the theatrical announcements of Dublin, and for many months are not again recognized.

The Dublin people have always enjoyed much reputation as theatrical judges; and managers generally consider that any performer who becomes a favourite in Ireland, may be safely engaged for the amusement of a London audience. The musical proficiency of Mrs. Billington had been at once recognized with enthusiasm. She proceeded to Covent Garden Theatre, and executed her part with such unparalleled success, that the Patentee offered her an engagement at the salary of £1,000, and a benefit, for the remainder of the season. From this period until 1793, no manager ever dreamt of inviting the public to any musical entertainment without previously securing the services of Mrs. Billington. In the last named year she visited Italy, and astounded and fascinated even the Italians. Bianchi expressly composed for her his celebrated opera "Inez de Castro." Her success was startling. Imitated with industry by minor vocalists, and envied with malignity by others, Mrs. Billington was worshipped with enthusiasm by many, and admired by all. In the midst of this joyous intoxi-

Digitized by Google

cation, her husband, to whom she had been partially reconciled, dropped dead. Mrs. Billington left Naples and repaired to Rome,* and in 1799 entered the hymeneal pale a second time by her marriage with M. Felisent. Her matchless powers were now in their meridian. She returned to London, astonished the entire musical world, appeared before the Royal family, and continued to reign supreme and alone until her retirement in 1809. Felisent, however, squandered all his wife's earnings, and treated her with such brutality, that she died from the effects of a blow which he gave her. Owenson preceded her by a short time to the tomb. Michael Kelly in his "Reminiscences" speaks of Mrs. Billington as "an angel in beauty, and the St. Cecilia of Song."

In 1785 Owenson quarrelled with Richard Daly,† the high-flying lessee of the Theatre Royal, Dublin. Hard words were interchanged, and Owenson, full of revengeful pique, vowed that he would ruin Daly by an opposition house. The Music Hall in Fishamble Street happened to be in the market.‡ Owenson applied for a license to the Right Hon. James Horan, Lord Mayor of Dublin, who unhesitatingly granted the requisite warrant; and Fishamble Street Theatre was accordingly opened. It

* The following curious paragraph in 'Faulkner's Dublin Journal,' September 18, 1794, proves that the Episcopal Bench of that day and Mrs. Billington's moral character were not *sans reproche*. "The widow Billington is returning to England in the suite of a travelling Bishop; she is said to have laid aside her weeds in compliment to this prelate's refined taste, who likes nothing that smacks of sackcloth and ashes."

† Thespian Dictionary, 1805.

‡ In 'Faulkner's Journal' of April 27, 1784, "those great concerns in Fishamble Street, called the Musick Hall, part of the estate of R. Byrne, Esq.," are advertised.

Digitized by Google

had even then passed through many vicissitudes. In 1741 Handel delighted the Dublin people within the walls of "the new Musick Hall;" and Masquerades, Dr. Arne's vocalists, Roman Catholic meetings, Ridotto balls, Irish State lotteries, Conjuror's feats, and Walker's Lectures on Pronunciation had contributed until 1785 to render Fishamble Street a centre of attraction. Owenson went to some expense in preparing "new scenery, dresses, and decorations:" but his reign as manager lasted for merely one season. Daly, whose exclusive patent was then pending, made ample advances to a reconciliation with Owenson, and apprehensive lest he should make interest against the coveted licence, Daly offered him a re-engagement on advantageous terms, with the situation of acting manager.* The proposal was accepted, and as Owenson had now become an established favourite, the lessee had no cause to repent his liberality.

During Owenson's managerial reign in Fishamble Street, his daughter, Olivia, subsequently Lady Clarke, made her appearance—but *not* upon the stage She was therefore Lady Morgan's junior by ten years. A son who died young had been previously born. To these companions of her early days Sydney Owenson alludes in a juvenile poem printed sixty years ago.

Hungry critics will not fail to seize eagerly on "the oaten cake or new-laid egg;" but it must be remembered, in extenuation, that the authoress was yet in her teens, and that the beauties of her youthful essay more than counterbalance its defects.

I sought the hawthorn tree, beneath whose shade,
  Full oft I pass'd my truant hours gay,
The spot where once it bloom'd I quickly found,
  The tree itself had droop'd into decay!

* Thespian Dictionary, 1805.

Digitized by Google

I sought the cot, near my parental home,
  Where oft I stole the warlock tale to hear,
To feast on oaten cake or new laid egg,
  I found the place;—alas! no cot was there;

And you, ye treasur'd objects of my heart;
  Dear, lov'd companions of my early days,
With whom I ran my life's first frolic course,
  Mingled my smiles, and sung my untaught lays!

Oft on a stream that wound its trickling way,
  I well remember, near our lov'd abode,
We venturous launch'd our barks of paper built,
  Freighted with currants red, (delicious load.)

And as (true emblem of our careless days,
  Gliding life's stream) we eager bent our eyes,
On passing ship, for theirs who swiftest sail'd,
  Claim'd both the fleet and fruit, a glorious prize!

Full various were our sports, yet not in sports
  Alone, pass'd on the tenor of our days;
To romps succeeded oft th' instructive page,
  And even wisdom mingled with our plays!

Owenson's popularity daily strengthened. He pourtrayed with credit a number of new characters, including that of Corporal Casey; but Sir Lucius O'Trigger and Major O'Flaherty seem to have been his most successful conceptions. John O'Keefe has recorded a very favourable impression of Owenson in the latter part: "His unrivalled representation of Irish character," observes a newspaper writer in 1812,* "still lives in the memory of many. When Mr. Cumberland saw him in his own Major O'Flaherty, he said 'he had beyond any other person realized his idea of a fine Irish gentleman.'" Another source has it that Cumberland "was in ecstacies at Owenson's acting; and when at length, the curtain fell, he bemoaned, almost with tears, that he

* 'Freeman's Journal,' May 28th, 1812.

Digitized by Google

had not given the Major more to do and say." Donaldson, speaking truthfully, but more tranquilly, of Owenson's "Major O'Flaherty" says that it was "a rich specimen of the Irish officer of the old school—witty, bold, and chivalrous."* "The West Indian" became an immense favourite in Dublin. "The public was charmed with a piece," observes a Dublin writer in 1794, "which, with uncommon merit, presented so amiable a portrait of an Irish gentleman, and in Major O'Flaherty, united the brave veteran soldier, with the man of feeling, whose heart was replete with the noblest impulses of humanity."†

But perhaps that which reflects the highest honour on the memory of Robert Owenson, is the generous and uncalculating protection and patronage which he afforded the unfortunate young poet, Dermody, the Chatterton of Ireland. An account of this more than kind conduct on the part of Owenson runs, stragglingly, through a memoir of Dermody, in two volumes, written by the late James Grant Raymond in 1806. This somewhat diffuse narrative, we shall endeavour, in justice to Owenson's memory, to condense.

"While Dermody was thus employed in the painting-room, as superintendent of the glue, oil, and colour-pots," writes his biographer, "Mr. Cherry with great rapture brought one morning into the green-room a poem written, as he said, by a most surprising boy then in the house. The subject of it was highly entertaining to the performers, being a sarcastic comparison between Mr. Daly, patentee of the Theatre Royal, and Mr. Astley, manager of the Equestrian theatre. The description which Mr. Cherry

* Donaldson's "Fifty Years of an Actor's Life." Part I.
† Hitchcock's "View of the Irish Stage," v. ii p. 186.

Digitized by Google

gave of the boy, together with the merit of the composition, raised among the performers the greatest curiosity to see him; and, led on by Cherry, they rushed from the green-room to the place where the painter and his wonderful attendant were at work. If their astonishment was excited on hearing the poem read, it was now increased tenfold at the sight of the author. Infantine in appearance, and clad in the very garb of wretchedness; with a meagre, half-starved, but intelligent countenance; a coat much too large for him, and his shoulders and arms seen naked through it; without waistcoat, shirt, or stockings; with a pair of breeches made for a full-grown person, soiled and ragged, reaching to his ancles; his uncovered toes thrust through a pair of old slippers without heels, almost of the magnitude of Kamtskatka snow-shoes; his hair clotted with glue, and his face and almost naked body smeared and disfigured with paint of different colours, black, blue, red, green, and yellow:—thus in amazement stood before them, with a small pot of size in one hand, and a hair-brush in the other, the translator of Horace, Virgil, and Anacreon! Each of the performers felt a sympathetic glow of tenderness for the wretched boy, and each seemed anxious to administer to his necessities. Among the number was Mr. Owenson; a gentleman conspicuous for his domestic attachments, and distinguished by his humanity. In him Dermody found a benefactor; he treated him with tenderness, received him into his family with affection, clothed, and became a second parent to him.

"At the appointed time, Dermody made his appearance at the house of his new friend. The description which Mrs. Owenson had received of him from her husband, raised in her mind the greatest

Digitized by Google

anxiety; and, being a lady of extreme feeling and sensibility, on seeing before her a child so forlorn and destitute, she burst into a flood of tears, clasped him in her arms, and gave vent to the noblest feelings of humanity. When he had partaken of some refreshment, which was pressed upon him with the warmest cordiality, Mr. Owenson asked him if he had any knowledge of the history of the college, or of its members. He answered, that the only information he had ever received, was that which magazines had occasionally given him. As Mr. Owenson's plan was to get him introduced to some distinguished person in the University, he thought that a theme on the subject would be a probable mode of paving the way to so desirable an object: he therefore gave him a slight account of it, and desired him to write down his thoughts in verse, and to notice the professors and students of the present day. Dermody took his leave; and in less than three quarters of an hour returned with about fifty lines, written as if he had been acquainted with the history of the university since its foundation was laid. Mr. Owenson was so much astonished at what he had done in the short time of his absence, that he began to doubt the possibility of his having been without some secret assistance from more matured talent; and lest he himself should be imposed upon, and laughed at for his credulity, he immediately carried pen, ink, and paper, into an adjoining room, gave him another subject to write upon, closed the door, and with impatience waited the result. In twenty minutes he re-entered and produced a poem that would have made any further disbelief in his genius a crime. Mr. Owenson, being now fully convinced that he was in every respect what he had been represented to be, with all the reality of friendship and the ardour of humanity,

Digitized by Google

put in force the plan of getting him an immediate introduction to the college." So far Mr. Raymond.

Owenson's generous interest in the boy increased, and through the instrumentality of his kinsman, the Rev. Dr. Young, afterwards bishop of Clonfert, he laboured with success in getting Dermody admission to the University of Dublin. Dr. Young, who was a Senior Fellow and Professor in the college, undertook to superintend the young poet's studies.

"Though the prospect was flattering," continues Mr. Raymond, "which now opened for Dermody's future comfort and pursuits, Mr. Owenson's zeal was still unabated; and he carried and introduced him in the same garments to many of the most exalted characters in Dublin. His reception was uniformly such as humanity could wish. Mr. Owenson always introduced him in rags, that his appearance might excite both wonder and compassion. The general plan which he adopted when the ceremony of introduction was over (which sometimes created much mirth) was, to ask for a Horace; and desire the gentleman of the house either to open the book and take an ode by chance, or to fix on any particular one, and then in the presence of the company he made Dermody translate it into English verse; which he always did with a peculiar grace, and in as short a time as any person could construe it in. When Mr. Owenson had fully satisfied their curiosity and gratified the feelings of the company, he generally left them, in order that at a future time he might have a claim on their generosity.

"He now fitted up an apartment for him in his own house, stripped him of his rags, made him the companion of his children, and treated him with all the endearing affection of a father. He had just lost

Digitized by Google

his only son, and he considered this as a substitute sent by Providence. Mrs. Owenson, who loved genius under whatever form it presented itself, and united to this intellectual propensity a benevolence the most unbounded, entered with the fondest solicitude into the interest of the child of her adoption, and taught her two amiable daughters to consider him almost as a being of a superior order. Her injunction was at all times held too sacred to be disobeyed; but in the present case indeed it was unnecessary; from their mother they inherited the tender throb of sensibility, and light and pleasant as the day was the task they had now to perform.

"As soon as a new wardrobe was prepared for Dermody, he made a burnt-offering of his old, and committed his former habiliments to the flames with classic solemnity; creating his new sisters high-priestesses of the altar, and their mother the presiding idol of the ceremony. While he stood in silence viewing the flames, his conscience appeared to strike him; and with a want of refined delicacy which his youth rendered innocent and perfectly excusable even before such spectators, eagerly snatching his *breeches* from the general conflagration, he thus apostrophized them."

But the poem, which is below Dermody's average power, the reader will readily excuse us for witholding.

In eccentricity of movement, mental and bodily, and in tendency to laziness, Dermody was "every inch a poet;" and Mr. Owenson soon discovered, to his no small chagrin, that the bard's attendance at college had been most capriciously irregular. Whenever he paid Dr. Young a visit, it was to discharge a flood of tears at the scholastic drudgery which had been opened, by special favour, to him; and to be-

Digitized by Google

wail the loss of these caresses which he once enjoyed in the arms of the muses. "As often as possible," writes Mr. Raymond, "he would sculk from what he called torture, and spend his hours playing with his adopted sisters, or in writing sonnets appropriate to the familiar incidents of their happy home." Although Dr. Young possessed a poet's cognomen he had neither bardic taste nor talent; and Dermody, as may be supposed, soon fell into dire disgrace at Alma Mater.

Mr. Owenson's intentions to serve Dermody did not stop here. He introduced the boy to the Rev. Gilbert Austin, a clergyman of great worth and learning who at that time kept a school of deservedly high repute in Dublin. Mr. Austin entered earnestly into the matter, and a plan was immediately adopted for the completion of his studies. Dermody continued for some time to attend the academy; but he manifested greater regularity in seeking his meals and bed at the house of his benefactor, than in penetrating the depths of Murray's Logic, or unravelling the mysteries of the Greek Lexicon.

Not long subsequent to this date we find Dermody thus addressing Mr. Owenson.

Long has my muse, devoid of wonted fire,
Her song neglected, and unstrung her lyre;
Too long, alas! has felt the iron hand
Of dire affliction:—but at thy command
Again she tunes her strain; again she tries
On feeble pinion eagerly to rise;
Again the bard renews his ancient lays,
And humbly dares attempt to sing thy praise;
Praise which, though void of ev'ry grace of art,
Yet flows unstudied from a grateful heart;
For though no flatt'ry decks my servile line,
Yet truth superior makes thy fame divine.
I say but that which modesty might hear,
Yet unabash'd confess these lines sincere.

Digitized by Google

This effusion, however, by no means conveys an adequate idea of Dermody's ordinary poetic power.

"His adopted sisters," continues Mr. Raymond, "in whose society he passed so many happy hours, were too affectionately regarded not to receive frequent tender marks of his esteem; and in the innocent play-mate they found the kind admonisher.

> Dear girls, in youth and beauty's prime
> Despise not friendship's graver rhyme;
> Friendship, that marks your early bloom
> Perfection's brightest tints assume.
> The tints of modest worth divine,
> When sense and harmless wit combine,
> Prompt each low passion to control,
> Or bind in rosy chains the soul.
> Oh, ever charming! let not Pride,
> Usurper bold, your breasts divide,
> Nor fashion beauteous nature hide;
> Assur'd your soft eyes' radiant hue
> Can heal, disturb, and conquer too;
> Oh! let not Affectation, queen
> Of the nice lisp, the mincing mien,
> And studied glance, obscure their rays,
> Blighting the bloomy wreath of praise.
> Yet, sure, this idly moral strain
> Is both presumptuous and vain;
> For well your tender hearts I know;
> Hearts formed to melt at every woe, &c.

The unfortunate young poet was not long in falling into as high disfavour with Mr. Austin as he had previously done with Dr. Young. Some practical Anacreontic tendencies aroused the virtuous ire of the clergyman. He quarrelled with Dermody; ordered him to perform some menial offices; and the poet retaliated by writing a very caustic lampoon on hs preceptor. Mr. Austin had previously shewn him many solid acts of kindness; but all intimacy was now irrevocably at an end, and the frail bard was forbidden Mr. Austin's house for ever. "Mr. Owen-

Digitized by Google

son," says Dermody's biographer, "was not one of these stern and relentless moralists, who, for a few youthful irregularities, would abandon the object of his care to perpetual distress. He grieved at the cause which obliged Mr. Austin to withdraw his protection; but at the same time he had the tenderness not to suffer the late object of it to be driven forth an outcast, to despair and perish." He accordingly introduced Dermody to Mr. Atkinson, Judge Advocate of Ireland, through whom the poor boy-poet was patronised and almost adopted by Lady Moira. But even this great patroness of literature became, eventually, disgusted with Dermody, who had now fallen into habits of intemperance and levity. He sank from bad to worse until, at last, death seemed a happy release to his misery.

In this deplorable state Dermody remained for a considerable time, and were it not for his tried and steady friend, Robert Owenson, by whose interest he was enabled to publish a volume of poems, he would probably have perished for want of bread. So assiduous was Owenson in his exertions to make the publication profitable, that he frequently took his stand in an eminent bookseller's shop, and not only offered the book for sale to the persons who entered, with an introductory sketch of the doleful history of the luckless bard, but absolutely accosted the passengers who passed the door. The biographer of Dermody assures us that Mr. Owenson "was very generally known and respected, and he was rarely unsuccessful in these applications." Owenson thus procured him considerable relief. Nor were Dermody's personal applications to the good-natured actor less productive. That his situation was often as pitiable as his benefactor's liberality was praiseworthy is evident. Writing to Owenson he says:—"Your

Digitized by Google

bounty to me has been like the Ocean, boundless and illimitable. From my appearance I am almost ashamed to call upon you. I shall only say that I have fasted for a longer time than caused the death of Chatterton."* To which Owenson replied:

"Accept the enclosed; and while so poor a man as myself can purchase a loaf you shall never want a share of it, in common with my dear girls. In answer to your former note call at Mr. Dixon's, corner of Crow Street, and by my desire he will give you three pair of stockings: it will be time enough to get some of that commodity when you enter the College, if ever you should have grace enough to accomplish so desired an object. Get them of such a kind as will be useful, not fashionable. Call at Rourk's and you will get a pair of shoes. I think you want them."

Owenson's kindness to Dermody brought its own recompense. Sydney, in a copy of verses entitled "Retrospection," which she threw off in the year 1800, thus refers to her juvenile friend,

And you my sometime brother, o'er whose birth
  Genius presided! wit new strung his lyre;
The muse her future bard to slumbers sung,
  And e'en his lisping numbers did inspire!

Thou form'd my infant taste, and from thy lips,
  My mind imbib'd th' enthusiastic glow;
The love of literature, which thro' my life
  Heighten'd each bliss, and soften'd every woe!

* John Francis Waller, who, whether in song or story is always true and sparkling, writes: "Dermody must be ranked amongst the greatest geniuses. His early poems are superior in fancy, sentiment, and nature, to those written by Pope or Cowley at a more advanced age; and it is impossible to read his prose essays without being impressed with the purity and elegance of his style, the sobriety and sound judgment of his criticisms, the correctness of his taste, and the extent of his erudition."

Digitized by Google

In the first edition of this work, it was incidentally mentioned that Lady Morgan in her very early life had performed for some time with her father upon the boards; but no authorities were produced for the assertion, beyond a passing reminiscence expressed by the late Dr. Burke of the Rifle Brigade. "I well remember," said that gentleman, "the pleasure with which I saw Owenson personate Major O'Flaherty in Cumberland's then highly popular Comedy of the 'West Indian,' and I also well remember that the long-afterwards widely-famed Lady Morgan performed at the same time, with her father, either in the 'West Indian' or an afterpiece. This took place at Castlebar before the merry, convivial Lord Tyrawley and the officers of the North Mayo militia."

"Miss Owenson," observed a high literary authority, "may have performed in private theatricals at Castlebar, before 'the convivial Lord Tyrawley,' without being a member of any dramatic company, and without playing on any public stage. A genuine biographical charm attaches to the inquiry, and Mr. Fitzpatrick should pursue it. Lady Morgan had a most happy genius for stage mimicry and characterization, was most passionately attached to private theatricals; and it would be curious to know whether she had ever displayed this genius on the real stage."*

* "Athenæum," September 10, 1859.—If any Private Theatrical exhibition took place at Castlebar, before Lord Tyrawley, there is no mention of it in the valuable work entitled "The Private Theatre at Kilkenny, and other Private Theatres in Ireland," of which fifty copies only were printed, in 1825. The list begins with a notice of the theatrical performances at Mr. Brownlow's of Lurgan in 1759, and Mr. Conolly's of Castletown, in the following year. In 1761, Lord Kildare opened Carton to a series of similar entertainments. In 1774, plays were got up at Knock-

Digitized by Google

There are very few persons now living, competent to furnish any personal information on this point. All we can do is to collect a few waifs and strays, and let the reader draw his own conclusion. An octogenarian player, Mr. W. A Donaldson, in his recently published "Fifty Years of an Actor's Life," tells us, "Lady Morgan is the oldest writer in Great Britain. This highly gifted woman begun her career in the dramatic world. Her father was the manager of several theatres in Ireland, where she sustained characters suited to her juvenile years, with considerable ability, but when her father ceased management, her ladyship devoted her attention to literature." To this evidence it may be added, that one of Ireland's most distinguished Celtic scholars, was assured by the late Dean Lyons of Erris, by the late Thaddeus Connellan, Itinerant Preacher in Connaught, and by the late Mr. Nolan clerk of the Ordnance at Athlone, that they had seen Owenson and his little daughter, act at Sligo and elsewhere, throughout Connaught. But in recording these reminiscences, it is right to add

topher, Farmley, and Kilfane, the seats of Sir H. Langrish, Henry Flood, and Gervais Parker Bushe. Grattan acted the part of Macbeth, on one of these occasions, and his great rival Flood that of Macduff. In 1776, the Right Hon. David La Touche, produced a theatrical fête at Marlay. Shane's Castle, Co. Antrim, the seat of Mr. afterwards Lord O'Neill, became the scene of theatric festivities in 1785. Lord Mountjoy opened a private theatre in 1778. The Countess of Ely, in 1786, and again in 1789, produced a series of dramatic entertainments known as "The Attic Theatre," at Ely Place Dublin. In 1787, "The Shane's Castle Association," got up a very beautiful little theatre in Shaw's Court, Dublin, the site of which is now occupied by the Commercial Buildings. Lord and Lady Grandison during the same year, indulged their friends with a few plays at Dromara, County of Waterford. In 1793 Fishamble Street Theatre, was taken by a company of noblemen and gentlemen, and in 1795, French plays were performed at Roebuck Castle, the seat of Lord Trimbleston.

Digitized by Google

that the impression of Lady Morgan's nieces is that she, at no period, appeared on the stage.

The result of a few substantial benefits at Smock Alley enabled Owenson to hire successively some of the provincial theatres in Ireland. Accompanied by a small but select company he went the round of them in 1785. Early personal and local associations led him to give the preference of selection to the province of Connaught.

A distinguished member of the Royal Hibernian Academy, and a native of the west of Ireland, tells me that he often heard his late father describe the colossal form of Owenson as he wound his way, with some theatrical dresses on one arm, and his tiny daughter Sydney supported on the other—down Market Street, Sligo, *en route* to the little theatre adjacent. This interesting incident probably occurred about the year 1788. Mrs. Owenson must have been dead at that time. It is at least certain that the good lady was not living in 1789.* She remained quite long enough, however, to leave an indelible impression on the mind of little Sydney, and to endear her memory, in a peculiar manner, to the children. In some lines on her "Birth Day," written about the year 1798, Sydney refers to

> "The cheap, the guileless joys of youthful hours,
> The strength'ning intellect's expanding powers;
> The doating glance of fond maternal eyes,
> The soft endearment of life's earliest ties:
> The anxious warning that so often glow'd
> On these dear lips, whence truth and fondness flowed.
>
> Those lips that ne'er the stern command impos'd,
> These thrice dear lips—for ever, ever closed!

The result of much inquiry on the subject has convinced us that Sydney Owenson never performed

* Raymond's Life of Dermody, v. i. p. 106.

Digitized by Google

at any of the Dublin Theatres, but may have appeared, when a mere child, in connection with some of her father's professional tours through the western counties of Ireland. Owenson always flung himself into theatricals with hearty raciness and *abandon;* but the more he saw of stage life, its temptations, dangers, and anxieties, the stronger grew his disinclination to see any near and dear relative of his treading the boards.

Greatly to Owenson's credit, he placed little Sydney successively at two excellent educational establishments, one at Drumcondra, and the other near Clontarf, both in the immediate vicinity of Dublin. The first was situated opposite Belvidere, the residence of the late Sir Coghill Coghill, and has been for many years used as a Widow's Alms House. Shortly before Lady Morgan's death, she obtained a photograph of this old building, in fond recollection of Auld Lang Syne. Whether this was the school noticed by Seward in his account of Drumcondra, as having been founded by the late George Purdon Drew in 1784,* it is not easy to determine. Some time subsequently, Owenson sent his two little girls to an eminent boarding school, in the neighbourhood of Clontarf, of which Madame Tesone, an accomplished French lady, was the principal. Here it was that Miss Owenson acquired that facility and fancy for French dialogue and phraseology with which her subsequent writings were extensively interlarded. Mr. P— of Dublin, now in his eighty-ninth year, remembers the Miss Owensons at Madame Tesone's school. In 1796, Owenson opened a theatre in the ball-room of Mrs. Pye's inn at Ballyshannon. "As he was an animated, lively, and witty gentleman of

* Topographia Hibernica, Dublin, 1795.

Digitized by Google

good address," observes an esteemed correspondent,* "he had contracted a tolerable intimate acquaintance in the house of a Mrs. Williams, a near relation of ours, and living next door to my father's house. This old lady often had Owenson and his two daughters to spend their evenings with her, and I recollect often hearing Mrs. Williams discuss the subject that Owenson always declared that, with his consent, his daughters should never adopt the stage as a profession. Owenson, on this visit to Ballyshannon produced amongst other pieces, 'The Spoiled Child.' This part was performed by Miss Walstein, who afterwards attained great celebrity on the stage."

The book which chiefly formed and guided Miss Owenson's literary taste was the 'Anthologia Hibernica,' a monthly magazine, started at Dublin in 1793. It breathed a healthy tone of nationality, and inculcated an appreciation of Irish worthies, literature, archeology, self-reliance and self-respect. In the list of subscribers to the work the name Miss Owenson may be found. It was the 'Anthologia Hibernica' which introduced Moore's youthful muse to the public.

Some doubts have been expressed as to the religious opinions in which Sydney Owenson was reared and educated. The following passage, however, is conclusive on the subject. In 1807, she tells us, in a note to 'The Patriotic Sketches' "For myself, though one among the many in my own country who have been educated in the most rigid adherence to the tenets of the Church of England, I should, like the poor Maritoanes of Cervantes, think myself endowed with very few 'sketches and shadows of Christianity,' were I to confine virtue to sect; or

* Letter from E—— A——, Esq., J. P., Ballyshannon.

Digitized by Google

make the speculative theory of opinion the test of moral excellence, or proof of human perfection."

Lady Morgan has been heard to say that her mother though possessing many endearing domestic virtues, was a person of such excessive Puritanical tendencies that instead of stimulating the religious zeal of her children, she but too fatally gave them a distaste to long visaged sanctity, and all practises of the "Praise-God-Bare-Bones school." To this circumstance may be attributed the occasional deistic tone visible in some of the later writings of Lady Morgan. But let it not be supposed that the authoress was wanting in affectionate devotion to her mother's memory. In addition to the evidence already adduced, the following lines from a little piece called "Retrospection," printed in 1801, shews the contrary:

> My sainted mother too, methinks I view
> Thy endearing smile, my ever sweet reward;
> For each unfolding talent ever gain'd
> Thy fond approvings, and thy dear regard.
>
> Even still methinks, soft vibrate in mine ear,
> Thy well remember'd tones, and still I trace
> In thy dear eyes, thy fond maternal love,
> Catch thy last look, and feel thy last embrace.
>
> The dying wish that hover'd o'er thy lips,
> Thy last, last words, soft, trembling, broken, faint,
> That my sad breaking heart receiv'd of thine,
> And spoke the woman's conquest o'er the saint!
>
> Were these, "dear child of all my tenderest care,
> Transfer that duteous love to me you pay'd,
> To thy dear sire;—live but for him," and died;—
> Say blessed spirit, have I disobeyed?

Owenson took a thoroughly warm interest in his little girls, and shewed them much more affectionate

Digitized by Google

attention than the generality of players can afford to do. The late George Stawell of the Munster Bar in conversing with the gentleman from whom we give the anecdote, observed: "I lodged, when a young man, opposite to Mr. Owenson, in Dublin; and nothing, even then, struck me more than the regularity with which the widower, leaving the gaieties of the city behind, would, twice every day, take his little daughters, Olivia and Sydney, out to walk with him. His heart appeared to be entirely wrapped up in his two girls whom he used to bring with him, holding one by each hand, into the country."

Many more illustrations might be cited to shew the activity, strength, and vigilance of Owenson's parental feeling. He knew the world and its dangers well. An octogenarian resident of Sligo, writing to the author on November 12th, 1859, observes: "When Owenson visited Sligo with his dramatic company he used to lodge at Mrs. Browne's in Market Street. The town was then a wondrously gay place, full of military and militia, theatricals, balls, and so forth. Owenson was so careful of his little girls that he would not leave them behind him in Dublin, although his means were often crippled enough. The officers who used frequently to have Owenson at their mess (who was the life and soul of society) thought they had nothing to do but call on the player's daughters at their lodgings, and, when sick of billiards, to while away some of their heavy leisure moments in a flirtation or two. Owenson was indignant at this liberty, and I well remember his saying to the two girls "If ever they call again, send for me that moment, that I may turn the idle rascals out." As he said this he drew up his enormous frame to its fullest height, with a

Digitized by Google

flashing eye, and he really looked as though he not only would, but could, pitch an entire mess-room of ensigns out of the window in one arm full."

This anecdote belongs to the year 1795; but as it helps to illustrate some preceding remarks we have ventured to anticipate a little.

It is not surprising that Owenson's parental virtues should have filled the susceptible and appreciative mind of his daughter with impulses of the most lively affection and gratitude. Since the sad day when little Sydney and her still smaller sister were deprived of their poor mother's protection and guidance, their love, as was only natural, became entwined around the remaining parent with concentrated intensity.

From Sydney's heart and lips this filial feeling found frequent utterance. A little poem written by Miss Owenson in her infancy, and suggested by a portrait of her father, is not without its charms and beauties :—

Dear shade of him my heart holds more than dear,
  Author of all that fond heart's purest bliss;
Dear shade, I hail thee with a rapturous tear,
  And welcome thee with many a tender kiss!

This brow indeed is his; broad, candid, fair,
  Where nature's honest characters are wrote;
But o'er the beauteous transcript, morbid Care
  And Time, of late, their ruthless fingers smote;

And this th' expressive eye, whose glance I've woo'd,
  (For ah! beneath that glance each task seemed light;)
I've seen this eye with tears of fondness dew'd,
  And through the lucid radiance beam more bright.

Seen it transfix'd with sweet, approving gaze,
  On some faint strain the youthful muse inspir'd;
Seen it for hours pursue the pencil's maze,
  With parent pride, and partial fondness fir'd!

Digitized by Google

But painter, far above thy wond'rous art
Were these dear lips; dear lips where ever play'd
The smile benignant, where the honest heart
In undisguis'd effusions, careless strayed!

Dear lips where oft each fond endearment glow'd,
Less prompt to emanate reproof than praise;
Dear lips from whence the anxious counsel flow'd,
The moral precepts, or amusive lays.

These shoulders too I've climbed to steal a kiss,
These locks my infant hands have oft carest;
These arms I oft have filled, and shared the bliss,
For ah! with me, these arms a sister prest!

Twin objects of the tenderest father's care,
A mother's loss we rather knew than felt;
Twin objects still of every ardent prayer,
On whom each thought, each fear, each fond hope dwelt!

Come then, thou thrice dear shade, for ah! no more,
Thou true and lov'd resemblance will we part;
For till the last faint thrill of life is o'er,
Dear shade, I'll wear thee next my beating heart!

And so she did. A more filially fond heart never existed; and to the last day of Lady Morgan's long life, her father's memory and portrait were venerated and treasured by her with an ardour and enthusiasm, as edifying as it was intense.

The striking resemblance which those lines, and others on her mother—published elsewhere in this memoir—bear to Cowper's verses on his mother's picture, cannot fail to have struck the reader. We not only have the same thought and metre, but the same mood and impersonation. It must, however, be recollected that the infant poetess borrowed the flowers to adorn her mother's bier, and her father's brow.

Richard Daly opened the "New Theatre Royal," Crow Street, on January 18th, 1788, with a sufficient

Digitized by Google

if not a strong company, of which Robert Owenson was one. The decorations were of a very gorgeous character, as well they might be, for, as an advertisement of the day assures us, "Mr. Daly having expended upwards of £5,000, unassisted by public aid, or private subscription, will, he trusts, speak more powerfully than any terms he could find to express his uniform wish to advance the reputation of the stage, and merit the patronage of a city whose national entertainments he has the honour to conduct. NB. The house will be illuminated with wax."*

Owenson's favourite character at Crow Street, throughout 1788, seems to have been Friar Tuck in Leonard Mac Nally's comic opera of "Robin Hood." The Marquis of Buckingham, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland commanded and witnessed the performance.†

During the previous year Owenson's performances were more frequent and varied. His chief parts seem to have been Zedan in Mrs. Inchbald's "Such Things Are," Colonel Staff in Leonard Mac Nally's comedy of "Fashionable Levities," Counseller Flummery in O'Keefe's musical interlude of "The Farmer," and The Governor in "The Critic."‡

On Monday, January 12th, 1789, Owenson played Oliver in "As you like it;" but did not appear again at Crow Street during that year, until December 19th, when he performed Sergeant Jack in O'Keefe's comic opera of "The Highland Reel." This piece brought his lungs into frequent play. Among other vocal efforts he was obliged to vociferate Handel's Grand Drum March. The interval of Owenson's absence from Dublin was no doubt

* Dublin Chronicle, January 17th, 1788.

† Ibid, November 8th, 1788, &c.

‡ Sleator's Dublin Chronicle for 1787, *passim*.

Digitized by Google

spent in a professional tour through the Provinces. The theatrical advertisements of the time shew that "The Highland Reel" and "Serjeant Jack" had a considerable run in Dublin. On Thursday, February 18th, 1790, was produced, for the first time, the comic opera of "The Haunted Tower," in which Owenson sustained the part of Martin. Mr. P——, of Dublin, already referred to, well remembers the infinite humour with which Owenson, about the year 1789, performed Captain O'Cutter in Colman's comedy of "The Jealous Wife." Acting which could leave an impression so deep and enduring must have had something peculiarly vivid in it. The fact is not less creditable to Owenson's fame as a comedian than to the vigour of our respected informant's memory. His retentiveness is corroborated by Sleator's 'Dublin Chronicle' of May the 18th, 1790, in which it is announced that Owenson will on that evening perform the part of Captain O'Cutter. The other characters in the piece were sustained by Palmer, Cherry, and Mrs. Abington. "Owenson's liberal education, singularly gentleman-like deportment, polished manners, and exquisite humour," observes a writer fifty years ago,* "rendered him a welcome guest at the first tables." Could it have been to Owenson that George Colman alluded, who, when he went to see the actors at the Dublin Theatre perform his own comedy of "The Jealous Wife," said that they all spoke with the most determined brogue except Captain O'Cutter (the only Irish character in the piece) who gave forth pure and perfect English throughout the whole of the performance.† From May 18th, 1790, until May 10th,

* 'Freeman's Journal,' May 28th, 1812.
† Reminiscences of Michael Kelly, v. ii. p. 84.

Digitized by Google

in the following year, when he performed as Sir Lucius O'Trigger, we find no mention of Owenson's name in the Dublin play bills. During this interval he was evidently on duty through the Provinces with his strolling company.

"Carried away by the tumultuous applause of the galleries," observes Mr. P——, "Owenson was occasionally induced to burlesque his characters too much; but he quickly corrected himself and resumed a tolerably accurate conception of the dramatist's ideal. He had a simplicity of face when he said 'It is a very pretty quarrel as it stands,' which was delightful." Another source writes from information furnished by the Apostle of Lower Connaught. "He was sometimes so comical looking, and so full of humour that the very face of him would excite loud laughter." It has often been said that as a delineator of the Irish character, Johnstone never had his equal before or since. Barrington, however, speaking of Johnstone, says that "Nature had not given him enough of that original *shoulder-twist,* and what they call the *poteen twang,* which so strongly characterises the genuine *vis comica* of the lower orders of the Irish. In this respect Owenson was superior to him."*

Daly held the patent of the Theatre Royal, Crow Street, conjointly with Francis Higgins, surnamed the Sham Squire, perhaps the most loathsome public character that had ever figured in Ireland. As we learn for the first time from the recently published Cornwallis Correspondence, it was Higgins who received the Government reward for the betrayal of Lord Edward Fitzgerald. The *Dublin Evening Post,* then the exclusive organ of the popular party,

* Sir Jonah Barrington's Personal Sketches, vol. ii. p. 207.

Digitized by Google

poured a perpetual broadside of ridicule on Daly and Higgins. The Sham Squire edited the Government newspaper of that day, and Daly seems to have been vilified on no other grounds than those furnished by the old adage, "show me your company and I will tell you who you are." In the *Dublin Evening Post* of May and June, 1789, we find frequent poetic squibs exploding at Daly's expense. One casually alludes to the mutiny against Daly which Owenson was sometimes induced to head. Daly's days of prosperity were, at this time, numbered:

> And is it come to this, at last, he cried,
> Gone is the food of all my former pride;
> No more will actors on my steps attend,
> Or humble actresses obedient bend.
> No more will authors at my levee wait,
> No more I'll damn their works in pompous state;
> E'en now perhaps with joys does Chalmers burn,
> And OWENSON will kick me in his turn.
>
> * * * *
>
> Yet this shall end my woes and me, he cried,
> And drew his glittering weapon from his side;
> But as too hard the yielding blade he prest,
> The tragic tin bent harmless on his breast.

It is a fact worthy of note, and curiously illustrative of the lax system of law prevailing in Ireland at the period of which we write, that Richard Daly having swore that in consequence of this Poem he had received damages to the amount £4000, Lord-Chief-Justice Clonmel, granted a fiat against the Proprietor of the *Evening Post*, marked with that exorbitant amount, although the damages subsequently given by the Jury were £200 only.* The Chief Justice's unconstitutional conduct was brought before Parliament, and the result was a law restricting the judges in future to an inferior and definite sum.

* Irish Parliamentary Register, vol. 11. Trial of John Magee for libel on R. Daly, Dublin 1790.

Digitized by Google

We have spoken of the rapturous applause with which Owenson was often received, especially by the galleries. Some interesting exceptional cases might be cited. "I have frequently spoken to old men," writes an illustrious Irishman, "who saw Owenson hissed off the stage in Dublin for singing an Irish song—'The Drimmin-doo-deelish'—which he used to sing very well. But the Dublin audience in his time was strongly anti-Irish and Orange in their feelings."*

The Drimmin-dhu-Deelish is an Irish Jacobite relic of which Samuel Ferguson has given us a translation. It literary signifies "Brown Cow," but most people knew that King James, and not the Cow, was the real object of the singer's eulogy and love. The "Black Bird," another treasonable song, had a similar style and aim. Both were political pass-words. We can well imagine the earnestness with which the violent champions of the Protestant ascendancy of that day hissed Owenson off the stage whenever he attempted to sing the original Irish of the following:

> But if I could get sight of the crown on his brow,
> By night and day travelling to London I'd go;
> Over mountains of mist and soft mosses below,
> Till I'd beat on the kettle-drums, Drimmin Dhu, O
>
> Welcome home, welcome home, Drimmin Dhu, O!
> Good was your sweet milk, for drinking, I trow;
> With your face like a rose, and your dewlap of snow,
> I'll part from you never, ah Drimmin Dhu, O †

---

* Letter from John O'Donovan, L.L.D., September 1, 1859.

† Calanan has also translated this Jacobite relic. In his version the brown "Drimmin" is asked "where are the strong ones?" to which she replies that they sleep beneath the cold turf, but that like leaves on the trees, new people will arise to chase the flint-hearted Saxon away.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Donaldson tells us that Owenson sung the Drimmin-dhu-Deelish "with such feeling as brought the tear to beauty's eye."* Another celebrated song of Owenson's was "The Kilruddery Hunt," or *Shela-na-guira,* a spirited Tally-ho effusion. Of his Connaught songs, "Shela beg na Connel lawn" (little Shela Connellan) was probably the best. "He is author of some of the best Irish songs extant," says a writer in 1812. "He played with taste and skill on several instruments, and was the last surviving pupil of Doctors Arne and Worgan."†

In 1793 we find Owenson still with Daly. The 'Anthologia Hibernica' for March 1793 says "the acknowledged excellence of our deserving countryman in Irish characters is too well known for us to enlarge upon. His Foigard was given in his very best manner." Noticing Owenson's benefit, the 'Anthologia' tells us "Seldom has the theatre witnessed such an overflow. It was a just tribute to a man of irreproachable character in public and private."

In 1794, Owenson believing that the proverbial theatrical taste of Kilkenny furnished a good opening for the erection of a new and handsome theatre‡ in that city, accordingly embarked in the arduous and costly undertaking alluded to. The work sped apace, but time proved that it reflected greater credit on Owenson's histrionic taste, than on his prudence. His capital was, by far, too small to justify him in attempting single handed, so important and extensive an undertaking. The difficulties which eventually overwhelmed and ruined Owenson began to knit from this moment. It was beneath their pressure that little Sydney penned some sad lines, beginning:

* Donaldson's "Fifty Years of an Actor's Life." Part I.
† 'Freeman's Journal,' May 28th, 1812. ‡ Ibid.

Digitized by Google

Come, balmy sleep, thou transient, sweet relief,
Shed o'er my aching eyes thy soothing power;
And mingle with the silent tear of grief,
One drop extracted from thy opiate flower!

The handsome edifice that Owenson erected at Kilkenny, was afterwards immortalized as the scene of the far-famed amateur theatricals to which Tom Moore, Miss O'Neil, Bushe, Crampton, and Corry imparted a rich lustre. In 1851 it was thrown down, in order to make room for the erection of a public meeting room. A very small portion still remains.

Owenson about this time became patentee of the Londonderry Theatre.* His company was small but select, and included many persons who subsequently attained the highest rank on the stage. Miss Walstein at this period played such parts as "The Spoiled Child," and "The Four Mowbrays."

The violent political ferment, however, which agitated Ulster from 1790, until quenched by the blood shed in '98, completely neutralized its once proverbial theatrical taste. People thought only of party politics and excesses. The Londonderry Theatre was deserted. Owenson and his little company played to empty benches; a heavy pecuniary loss resulted, and hoping for better luck our wandering patentee shifted the scene of his labours to Connaught.

The political excitement of Ulster at the period of which we write, may be inferred from a few historical facts. In 1784† the "Peep o'day boys," afterwards known as "Wreckers," and "Orangemen," sprung up in the north of Ireland. They broke into the houses of their victims to search for arms; and in doing so, confesses one of their body, "they often committed the most wanton outrages.‡ Full of loyal

* 'Freeman's Journal,' May 28th, 1812.
† Madden's "United Irishmen," v. i. p. 120.
‡ "History of the Rebellion," by Sir R. Musgave, p. 54.

Digitized by Google

zeal, and replete with a violent desire to acquire the lands and tenements of the Roman Catholic peasantry, they posted on every Papist's door, "To hell or Connaught." In the beginning of 1796, seven thousand Catholics had been forced or burned out of one northern county alone.* They took refuge in Connaught; their property was transferred to Protestants. "That," added Mr. Cristie, "occurred within my own knowledge."†

The consequence was that the western province of Ireland became overcharged with population; and Owenson hoped that among so many people, a dramatic exhibition could not fail to pay. But the feelings of the major portion were steeped too deeply in gloom to seek or care for pleasure. Some, 'tis true, sought it in the hope of momentarily forgetting care, but the majority sternly held aloof. The population of Connaught at the close of the last century was a despondent, and to a theatrical manager, a deceptive population.

Owenson could not afford to keep his daughters longer at Madame Tessone's academy. The property of which Mrs. Owenson was possessed, dropped, we believe, at her death. He removed the little girls from Clontarf to another but a cheaper school in Dublin. A party who ought to know much upon the subject, informs us that "little Sydney was (finally) educated by Miss Crowe, who kept an eminent seminary in North Earl Street, Dublin."

In the Dublin Directory from 1787 to 1801, the name "Elizabeth Crowe, Milliner, 20, North Earl Street," appears on record. That this establishment had some connection with "the eminent seminary,"

* Plowden's "History of Ireland," v. ii. p. 377.

† Minutes of Evidence taken by the Select Committee on Orange Lodges, 1835, p. 379-80.

Digitized by Google

up stairs, we are inclined to think likely. The local customs of the time sanctioned such a combination. Every student of the literary history of Ireland towards the close of the last century, is familiarly acquainted with the name of Samuel Whyte, the accomplished preceptor of the Duke of Wellington, Sheridan, Moore, and Emmet. Whyte was a man of distinguished erudition, and a poet of no mean calibre. His seminary was, as Moore's Life of Sheridan informs us, the first in the metropolis. Wilson's Directories of the period thus notice it:—

"Whyte, Samuel, Master of the Seminary for English Grammar, Geography, &c. } 75 Grafton St."
Whyte, William, Grocer. }

When we find that Whyte's* famous Academy for Young Gentlemen was admittedly none the worse for its proximity to figs, sugar, and bottled cider, it would be hardly just or fair to condemn Miss Crowe's seminary for young ladies, because the shop below may have displayed a large and varied assortment of

* Mr. Q——, now in his eighty-first year, is, with one exception, the last surviving pupil of Whyte's. That gentleman is our authority for the statement that the late Duke of Wellington received instructions at Whyte's academy. Mr. Q—— has heard his old preceptor vauntingly declare, that he had flogged the breech of the subjugator of Tippoo Saib. How vastly would Mr. Whyte's pride have increased, had he lived to boast that the conqueror of Napoleon had been under his hand, and piteously cried for mercy at his knees! Mr. Q—— tells us that Whyte's taste and talent for flogging were not inferior to Mr. Squeers's passion in the same direction. Although his right arm was short almost to deformity, it possessed great strength, and was the terror of every pupil. "Such brutal flogging," observes Mr. Q——, "would now no more be tolerated than an insolent attempt at assault and battery in the public streets." Whyte died October 4th, 1811.

Digitized by Google

colossal hats, and other obsolete, but once fashionable articles of female head-gear.

Owenson fitted up a theatre in Water Lane, Sligo, but his entertainment failed to meet with the encouragement he had expected. The manager, however, resolved to give the speculation a patient trial, and not to abandon it hastily. At certain periods of the season he removed his company to Cork; but only to return again to Sligo. Owenson's theatric staff must have been above the ordinary provincial calibre to stand the test of a Cork audience. O'Keefe, in noticing Irish dramatic talent in the last century, tells us that in Cork the Thespian art, and its actors were "in very high estimation. If a play on its first representation in London, should be driven from the stage, and an actor fail in a trial part, and therefore be neglected, such player and such actor were never brought either to Cork or Limerick. No dramatic piece was attempted to be acted in those places, but such as had gone through their probation, and been stamped with the seal of success by a London audience. The performers also were, in their walk, at the top of the profession."

A characteristic and interesting, but not particularly important letter, addressed by little Sydney at school in Dublin, to her father, "at the theatre, Cork," has been preserved. The care which Owenson took to make his daughter choose her company, as far as possible, above her, is traceable not less in this letter than in Lady Morgan's after life. Marlborough Street, to which she alludes, is situated, as most people know, within one minute's walk of the site of Miss Crowe's Academy.

"October 30, 1794,

"I have so often expatiated on the subject of

Digitized by Google

suspence, that it would be mere tautology to say what I have felt at my Dr Papa's long silence; or rather to attempt saying, for sensations of that kind are easier conciev'd than express'd, and tho' your Dr letter disipated my fears, yet I am not free from uneasiness. - That affection which is ever alive in the bosom of a *fond* child shrinks with *sensitive* feeling from the touch of apprehension, and is only to be convinced by ocular demonstration. Thus (unthankful as I am) I shall never be happy until I see you comfortably seated by the fire-side in our little parlor, and myself still more comfortably seated on yr knee (provided the burden be not too heavy) listening attentively while you the 'tale unfold,' and when 'tis finished I exclaim with Desdemona, ''tis true 'tis pity, and pity 'tis 'tis true;' but the quotation would not be applicable to every part of your unfolded tale, as the conduct and benevolent attention of yr Physician and Mr. Brennan, merits a better reflection; when I think on their goodness to you the words of Madame de Genlis always occurs to my mind, 'Virtue may be acquired, but goodness is a gift of nature,' and nature has been so profuse in that respect to both Gentlemen, that if acquired virtue were to step in, she would not find a single vacant spot to take possession of: what happiness it would give me to return personal thanks to these friends in the most literal sense of the word, is needless to say, as every friend by their efficacious endeavours have contributed to the restoration of my Dr Papa's health must be dear to me. You complain that I am sparing of my paper, but really, My Dear Sir, if you were enclosed within the walls of a boarding school yrself, you would find something to say no easy matter. As for news you will see more in a day's paper than I could send you in a week; and for writing on any subject

Digitized by Google

that may occur, it is not so easy as you *Beaux esprits* imagine. The muses, like all other ladies, are whimsical and inconstant, and it requires no little art to keep in their good graces. At one time they will preside over every line, at another they will scarcely deign to look over y[r] shoulder: so you may judge of my Muse's temper by the style of my letter. We spent two delightful evenings at Mrs. Lynche's of Marlborough Street. She is the most hospitable and the best natured woman I ever met with. There is a very fine grand forte piano, and I am highly gratified with my favorite amusement. We are to drink tea there to-morrow evening. *I should not have visited them only I was pretty-sure of y[r] permission, as it was y[r] wish I should go to the Play with them one night, and any one you would wish me to appear in public with, I am sure you would have no objection to in private.* I sent Molly to Mr. Dixon's, who says there is no one in the world he would so soon have as yourself, and that tho' more than one have been about them he has kept them for you.* You can have a drawing-room and dining-room, and bed-chamber on the first-floor, and bed-chamber on the second, with kitchen entirely to y[r]self for 40 guineas per year, they are fitted up in a very elegant style, all the rooms are new papered and painted, and the hall and staircase new oil-clothed, he begs you will write to him by return of post as the rooms are damp, and would require airing. Let me know for certain when we may expect you in. God bless you my D[r] Papa, take care of y[r]self.

"S. OWENSON.

* Owenson, when in Dublin, usually lodged with Mr. Thomas Dixon, a hosier, residing at No. 60, Dame Street. In the 'Dublin Journal,' (May 3rd, 1794), Owenson's benefit is announced, "of whom Tickets may be had at Mr. Dixon's, 60, Dame Street."

Digitized by Google

"I sent to-day to Mr. Lee's for some music, he seem'd quite pleased that I did so, and begg'd I would send whenever I wanted any.

"Mr. Owenson, Theatre, Cork."

Sam Lee, to whom Sidney Owenson alludes, was the leader of the band in Crow Street Theatre, and, as John O'Keefe tells us in his "Recollections," the first public performer on the violin. He opened a music shop on Cork Hill, and a coffee house in Exchange Street, both of which were much encouraged and frequented. He was by turns, witty, proud, resentful, and obliging. One evening, when returning to Dublin, after meeting some friends at a convivial dinner, he interchanged warm words with one of them. In consequence of this he refused to walk on the same side of the road with his quondam friend: in a passion he crossed over to the other side, missed his footing, fell down a steep, received some inward injuries, and died.

Were it not for the hospitalities and kind attention which Mrs. Lynch of Marlborough Street uniformly shewed to our young authoress at this period, the contracted sphere of Miss Crowe's Seminary would, no doubt, have become at times insupportable. That it was not particularly attractive, the following Poem, suggested by "a shower which prevented the writer returning to school at the expiration of the Christmas holydays," shews.

I ne'er did hail thy orient red,
Sol, when thou leav'st thy eastern bed,
And o'er the world thy glories spread,
and radiant power,
As when thou'st earth-drawn vapours shed
in heavy shower!

Digitized by Google

And oft I upward cast mine eyes,
(Tho' not I ween o'er weather-wise)
And gladsome view the frowning skies
while screaming crow
Proclaims the storm as high he flies,
to us below!

Now glad I hear the wind blow bleak,
View puss by fire her station take,
And grandmamma loud moanings make
of shooting corn;
For rain these signs portentous speak,
and gloomy morn!

Glad see I muddled streamlet stray,
Whose course no sunbeam renders gay,
Reflecting nought but wat'ry ray,
and dimpled o'er;
While goslings on its surface play,
before the door

The clear, pellucid drops I view,
As large they fall, tho' yet but few,
And sweet as Californian dew
to me appear;
Or stream that prophet Moses drew
From rocky source for murm'ring Jew,
in desart drear!

Now glad I throw straw bonnet by,
For sure to school I cannot hie,
While flood Deucalion pours the sky,
t' arrest my feet;
And this excuse I'll plead so sly,
compulsion sweet.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III.

Sydney Owenson introduced to the Connaught gentry.—"O whistle and I will be with you my lad."—A Beau for Miss Owenson.—Sligo Abbey.—The Post Boy.—"No letters."—A French fleet arrives in Killala Bay.—Defeat of the British Army.—Debt, difficulties, and seizure.—Owenson a ruined man.—Many sorrows and few friends.—Sydney Owenson's first book.—The subscribers.—Patronized by Lady Moira.—Miss Owenson precedes Moore in collecting the melodies of her native country.—Becomes a Novelist.—St. Clair, or the Heiress of Desmond.—Sligo again.—A pestle and mortar assists in composing "St. Clair."—"The Novice of St. Dominick."—Dermody's last Interview with Miss Owenson.

THE gentry of Sligo, whenever they succeeded in persuading Owenson to spend an evening with them, regarded as a compliment his acceptance of their invitations. His presence diffused electrical mirth around. Give him a bottle of claret, and a jug of poteen, and Owenson forgot all his care. He was never penurious of his songs, *bon mots*, stories, or sly advice. A wink from him would set the table in a roar. His society was courted with avidity;* but the theatre in Water Lane, of which he was manager, received scant patronage.

The Connaught gentry paid Owenson such attention that he came to Dublin for little Sydney, and brought her down to Sligo. The family of Sir

* Reminiscences supplied by the late Mr. Gillmor of Sligo when in his 91st year.

Digitized by Google

Malby Crofton of Colloony, the Everards, the Barclays, the Coopers, Phibbses, Booths, Ormsbys, and Norcots shewed the small girl much kindness and attention.

The legitimate drama having failed to take, poor Owenson endeavoured to fill his theatre by personating some very loudly comic characters. "I remember," observes an old Sligo lady, "enjoying his representation of the Killibegs Haymaker, with *suggauns* (or straw ropes) round his hat, waist, and legs, his coat in tatters, and straws sticking out of his brougues. I laughed heartily at him, as did his two daughters who were in the pit with, I think, an uncle of the present Sir Robert Gore Booth, of Lisadile, and indeed I thought I would be ashamed if my father were so dressed, but they enjoyed it greatly. I knew Miss Sydney Owenson well, she was a gay vivacious smart young woman; I remember her dining and spending the evening at Mr. Feeney's, a merchant of Sligo; she came in the full dressed fashion of that day, she danced gracefully. Being called on for a song, all our expectations were that we should hear some new French or Italian air, but, to our surprise, she took her sweet small harp, and played up the air and sung the song 'Oh whistle and I will be with you my lad.' Mr. Owenson was a very good comic actor. I remember having seen the same play acted afterwards in Dublin, but not so well as Mr. Owenson did it at Sligo. Miss Owenson spent a great deal of her time at the seat of Sir Malby Crofton. She often passed me on the road riding a nice pony, I thought that she did not sit so straight in her saddle as the ladies who accompanied her." Another octogenarian of Sligo writes, "I frequently went to Owenson's theatre in Water Lane, Knox's Street.

Digitized by Google

I remember his daughters in the pit with Mr. Harloe Phibbs, who attracted general observation, as a report was at that time rife that he was courting Miss Sydney Owenson. There were no boxes in Sligo Theatre then. Harloe Phibbs was the son of old Bloomer Phibbs who went by the name of 'Smooth Acres.' The fashionable improvidence of the day led to these acres being encumbered and sold. I remember, on the particular night in question, that Owenson's part was Pan, dressed up in goat skins, a very amusing character." The accuracy of Mrs. ——'s recollection will be sufficiently attested by referring back to pp. 21, 22.

The records of this period of Sydney Owenson's life and of the growth of her mind, are not numerous. Among other effusions, however, indicating a thoughtful and religious spirit, one, written on a tomb among the ruins of Sligo Abbey, merits transcription.—

And must I, ghastly guest of this dark dwelling,
Pale, senseless tenant, must I come to this;
And shall this heart congeal, now warmly swelling,
To woe's soft languor, rapture's melting bliss.

And must this pulse that beats to joy's gay measure,
Throbbing to bloomy health, this pulse lie still;
And must each sense alive to guileless pleasure,
Torpid resist the touch of transports' thrill?

And must each sensate feeling too decay,
(Each feeling anguished by another's sorrow)
This form that blushes youth and health to-day,
Lie cold and senseless thus, like thee, to-morrow?

Terrific Death! to shun thy dreaded pow'r
Who would not brave existence? direst strife?
But that beyond thy dark shade's gloomy bow'r,
Faith points her vista to eternal life!

Miss Owenson, ten years after, in referring to Sligo Abbey, and "her days of childhood" writes:

Digitized by Google

"An idea of its venerable ruins had insensibly associated itself with the remembrance of the lively susceptibility I then possessed, to every impression; and that idea still preserving its ascendancy in my mind, rendered the object that gave rise to it, an object of peculiar interest, and ardent curiosity. I have always loved those scenes which connect the pleasures of intellect with those of sense, which are equally dear to reflection and to fancy, over which the mental sympathies extend themselves, and where the heart and the eye repose with equal satisfaction and delight; and as I involved myself amidst the ruins of Sligo Abbey, where doubtless many a saint and many a hero trod, the beautiful apostrophe of Volney floated on my memory: 'Je vous salue ruines solitaires! Oui: tandis que votre aspect repousse d'un secret effroi les regards du vulgaire; mon cœur trouve à vous contempler le charme des sentimens profonds et des hautes pensées.'"

"The Country Post-boy," a relic of the same remote era of Sydney's early life, is a pleasing portraiture of a character now almost extinct. The fifth verse touchingly alludes to her poor mother who had just died.

Ah! careless wight, and e'en as careless, gay,
  Slow winding down yon mountain's rugged brow,
Cheering with ballad blithe thy weary way,
  And as thy thoughtless mule, as thoughtless thou!

Ne'er dreaming thou to many art a fate
  Replete with baleful tidings; big with woe
To cloud th' illusive beam of hope elate,
  Or blast the germ of love's first ardent blow!

To snap the golden, fragile thread of bliss,
  Deface the smiling portrait Fancy drew;
Convey the last farewell, the dying kiss,
  And change each tint of joy to mis'ry's hue!

Digitized by Google

To freeze the vital stream that warmly glows
Within the heart, to filial fears a prey;
The sad, but long expected task impose,
To weep the sainted parents swift decay!

Ah! orphan mourner, I can feel for thee,
For I, like thee, have cause to weep, to sigh;
Like thine, the parent heaven bestow'd on me,
Fled from her child, to claim her kindred sky!

Yet senseless wight, if thou the heart can'st wring,
And sadder certainty for sad doubt give;
Wealth, title, fame, 'tis also thine to bring,
And all for which the witless many live!

To the sad prisoner liberty convey,
To modest merit the unask'd award;
To dark despair restore hope's vivid day,
To injured innocence its just reward!

To act the herald of each tender thought
Of love—by lingering absence more refin'd;
With sentiment impassioned, glowing, fraught,
And all th' endearing intercourse of mind!

The Authoress, with beautiful diffuseness, then proceeds to say that "When stillness breathes along the silent groves," she loves to hear the wild tones of the Post-boy's horn float on the distance:

Now stealing faintly with vibration soft,
Now mingling louder with each passing gale,
Now 'midst the hills by echo answer'd oft,
And louder now it rings along the dale!

How throbs each pulse, with every varied sound,
How many ardent expectations burn,
How does my heart within my bosom bound?
And how I fly to meet, yet fear to learn?

Yes, 'tis for me—each character I kiss,
Then trembling, hoping, break the well-known seal
But why relate its tale of woe or bliss,
For ah! like me, who woe or bliss can feel?

Digitized by Google

The neighbourhood in which Sydney Owenson was located, possessed many striking natural beauties, and pleasing associations, peculiarly calculated to promote the growth of a warm poetic temperament. In her "Patriotic Sketches," the authoress paints a few of the more prominent features of Sligo.

"The scenery which environs the town," she writes, "is bold, irregular, and picturesque: and though despoiled of those luxurious woods which once (in common with the rest of the Island) enriched its aspect, it still preserves many of those traits which constitute the perfection of landscape; hanging over a beautiful bay formed by the influx of the 'Steep Atlantic,' sheltered by lofty mountains, and reposing almost at the brow of a hill along whose base the River Gitley steals its devious way. The high road by which it is approached for the last twenty miles, winds through a scene of romantic variety, which frequently combines the most cultivated and harmonious traits, with the wildest and most abrupt images of scenic beauty. The groves, the lakes, the enchanting islands, and all the glowing charms of an Italian scenery which diffuses itself over the picturesque and cultivated scenes of Florence-court, are suddenly replaced by a dreary heath, and a bold and continued mass of rocks, through which nature, time, and art, seem to have cut a deep and narrow defile which, entered at that hour sacred to the sombre grandeur of the true sublime, awakens in the heart of the traveller such a warning as the entrance to Dante's Inferno holds out." Miss Owenson also refers, at some length, to the romantic Glen of Knock-na-ree, situated within three miles of Sligo, and combining the finest ocean scenery, with many traits of striking picturesque landscape. Bathed in gloom, the overhanging rocks almost knit their tower-

Digitized by Google

ing summits. The authoress was much struck by the cloud-capped Heights of Benbullen, the Island of Innis-murry, celebrated as still containing part of the crosier of St. Molaire, the distant view of the undulating coast of Ulster, and Sugna-clogh, or the Giant's Grave, near the town of Sligo. Several immense stones are raised in a very curious and romantic manner, upon the ends of others, which seem pitched perpendicularly into the earth, and give to the eye an idea of Stonehenge.

The singular water-flight of Glencar did not fail to excite Miss Owenson's admiration. Deriving its source from the summit of a lofty hill, whose base it scarcely reaches, the glittering element is again carried perpendicularly back, forming a species of water-spout. Its appearance when seen under the influence of an unclouded sun, rising like a pillar of light, is strikingly beautiful: the least variation of the air breaks it into a feathery spray, which falls at a considerable distance, like the misty shower of a summer's evening, tinged with the departing glow of the horizon. But there are other aquatic curiosities near Sligo. The steep Hill of the Hawk is the first point of land seen on this coast at sea, and has long served as a landmark to mariners. Notwithstanding the altitude of Knock-na-shong, its summit contains a well which ebbs and flows with the tide. Of both mountain and well, tradition has preserved many miraculous tales.

Meanwhile the Rebellion of 1798 hurried to a crisis. Nothing else was spoken of: the conflict raged in Leinster, with frightful fury; Connaught, although shaken by excitement, had hitherto remained inactive. At last, on August 22nd. 1798, three French frigates under General Humbert, with twelve hundred men on board, entered Killala Bay, in the province of

Digitized by Google

Connaught, captured the town, took the Protestant bishop prisoner, unfurled a banner on which was inscribed "Erin go Bragh," invoked the peasantry to flock beneath it: distributed arms and ammunition, marched through the almost impassible defile of Barnageeragh, and surprised Castlebar! Lord Hutchinson with a tolerably numerous force, and a good train of artillery commanded the British Garrison. General, afterwards Lord Lake, had just arrived with a large reinforcement. On receiving information of the advance of Humbert, the English Generals beat to arms and took up position, with nine pieces of cannon, on a rising ground which seemed almost impregnable. As soon as the French column appeared, the British ordnance was brought to play upon it with apparent effect. Humbert, however, by a series of ingenious and irregular movements, speedily attained an advantage; the British line wavered, the cannon was abandoned to the enemy, and in a few moments the entire of the Royal army was flying like a mob! When the French captured the large town of Castlebar, the officers, in the true Gallic spirit, advertised a ball and supper that night. Numbers of ladies attended it; "decorum" writes Sir Jonah Barrington, "was strictly preserved. They paid ready money for everything." This joyous and chivalrous spirit, seems, indeed, surprising when the exhausted condition of the men is taken into account. "Their complexions," writes the Bishop of Killala, "were pale, their clothes much the worse for wear, they appeared incapable of enduring any hardship, and these were the men, however, of whom it was presently observed, that they could be well content to live on bread and water, and to make the stones of the street their bed. They had served in Italy under Buonaparte, and were of the army of the

Digitized by Google

Rhine. Several of them declared that at the Siege of Metz, they had slept on the ground in holes four feet deep under the snow, and an officer pointing to his leather small-clothes said "that he had not taken them off for a twelvemonth."

Several thousand of the Connaught peasantry and some of the gentry joined Humbert.* The sequel of this interesting historic incident is well known.

It may well be supposed that in the midst of this excitement and *débris*, Owenson's Thespian place and plans came to the ground. Miss O—, formerly of Sligo tells us that a few weeks previous to the battle of Castlebar, she well recollects "Owenson's stage scenery, dresses and decorations all under seizure by the landlord, for rent due by Owenson on

* General Humbert's address to the Irish people is an historic curiosity, and of some interest at the present moment.

"Irishmen—You have not forgot Bantry Bay. You know what efforts France has made to assist you. Her affections for you, her desire for avenging your wrongs and insuring your independence, can never be impaired. After several unsuccessful attempts, behold Frenchmen arrived amongst you. They come to support your courage, to share your dangers, to join their arms, and to mix their blood with yours in the sacred cause of liberty. Brave Irishmen, our cause is common; like you, we abhor the avaricious and blood-thirsty policy of an oppressive government; the peace of the world shall ever be troubled, as long as the British ministry is suffered to make, wlth impunity, a traffic of the industry, labour, and blood of the people. We swear the most inviolable respect for your properties, your laws, and all your religious opinions. Be free; be masters in your own country. We look for no other conqnest than that of your liberty—no other success than yours. The moment of breaking your chains is arrived: our triumphant troops are now flying to the extremities of the earth, to tear up the roots of the wealth and tyranny of our enemies. Irishmen, recollect the late defeats which your enemies have experienced from the French; recollect the plains of Honscoote, Toulon, Quiberon, and Ostend; recollect America, free from the moment she wished to be so. Union! liberty! the Irish republic!—such is our shout, let us march—our hearts are devoted to you; our glory is in your happiness."

Digitized by Google

the theatre, and that it was only after some considerable delay the property was released, and the debt liquidated by the then most eminent merchant of Sligo, Ignatius Everard, father of the distinguished barrister, Richard Everard, Esq, well known by the sobriquet of "Dicky Demurrer." But this act of kindness merely staved off temporarily the evil day. Difficulties soon pressed, in bewildering succession, upon our player. His family, for a time, felt the cold grip of penury; and were it not for the steadfast friendship of half a dozen sincere hearts, which sparkled, few-and-far-between, amid the dense and almost endless ranks of Owenson's professed friends and admirers, grim hunger and bitter sorrow might have weighed them down.

Nor were the few true friends to whom we have alluded any of the men "with handles to their names," who, in days gone by, were wont to invite Owenson, as a dramatic lion and convivialist, to their table. "His last friend," says Sir Jonah Barrington, "was old Fontaine,* a celebrated French dancing master, many years domiciliated and esteemed in Dublin. He aided Owenson and his family while he had the means to do so, and they both died nearly at the same time—instances of talent and improvidence."

In 1798, Owenson, in bad health, and worse spirits, retired from the stage. "He was at that time," writes Sir Jonah, "highly celebrated in the line of Irish characters, and never did an actor exist so perfectly calculated, in my opinion, to personify that singular class of people. Considerably above six feet in height;—remarkably handsome and brave-looking,—vigorous and well-shaped,—he was not

* "John Fontaine, dancing master, 43, Townsend-street," appears in the Dublin Directories, until 1803. W. J. F.

Digitized by Google

vulgar enough to disgust, nor was he genteel enough to be *out of character:* never did I see any actor so entirely identify himself with the peculiarities of those Irish parts he assumed. In the higher class of Irish characters (old officers, &c.) he looked well, but did not exhibit sufficient formal dignity: and in the *lowest,* his humour was scarcely quaint and original enough; but in what might be termed the '*middle class of Paddies,*' no man ever combined the look and manner with such felicity as Owenson. Scientific singing was not an Irish quality; and he sang well enough. I have heard Mr. Jack Johnston warble so very skilfully, and act some parts so very like a man of education, that I almost forgot the nation he was mimicking: that was not the case with Owenson; he acted as if he had not received too much schooling."

In 1798, as we have said, Owenson retired from the stage. Jack Johnston, originally a common soldier, had just made his *débût,* under Macklin's auspices, as an unrivalled delineator of the Irish character. Owenson's "occupation" was, from this moment, "gone," and a hopeless prospect lay on every side before him. The sensitive heart, and far seeing eye of his eldest daughter, became sadly and fully aware of the inevitable result. There is one little poem addressed to sleep, and written at this period, which it is not easy to read with dry eyes. It was thrown off during one of the many hours of bitter sorrow, which clouded the brow of the ruined player and his devoted daughter. Poor Sydney longed for sleep to drown her care. Though essentially different in versification, this poem is, in style and sentiment, hardly inferior to Shakspeare's celebrated address to the same solacing restorative:—

Digitized by Google

Shroud in thy downy and oblivious veil,
  The woes that still defer thy gentle reign,
And o'er my wearied senses softly steal,
  The welcome bondage of thy unfelt chain!

Wrap in forgetfulness my care-worn mind,
  Give to oblivion my prophetic fears:
My mem'ry in thy magic thraldom bind,
  Steal this sad sigh, and check these flowing tears.

O come! and let imagination beam
  O'er my soft slumbers her enchanting ray,
Shed her bright influence in some golden dream,
  And hover round me with illusions gay!

Invoke the mimic Fancy to thy aid,
  And all her frolic and ærial train,
With rosy visions cheer thy votarist maid,
  And with sweet treach'ry steal her bosom's pain!

Each fond affection in my heart revive,
  (By sorrow's torpid touch long lull'd to rest;)
Once to each thrilling tone of joy alive,
  But dormant now within my joyless breast!

Thus come delightful and delusive sleep,
  Thus o'er my wither'd spirits claim thy power;
In thy sweet balm my anguish'd feelings steep,
  For years of suff'rings grant one blissful hour!

The ode "To a Tear" is also sadly suggestive:—

Ah! when thou steal'st down pallid cheek,
Of poor affliction, sad and meek,
                heart-easing tear:
Then like the glowing shower, mild,
That oft succeeds the storm wild,
                thou dost appear!

Deprived, by death, of the companionship of a fond wife, and freed, by poverty, from the attentions of many friends, Owenson now looked to his loving daughters for solace and sincerity. In 1799 Sydney bade adieu to the picturesque and soul-inspiring

Digitized by Google

haunts with which Sligo abounded. Within the umbrageous seclusion of a little bower, planned with her own head, and planted by her own hand, she composed an elaborate farewell ode, from which we cull a few closing couplets :—

No more shall now my steps intrude
Amidst thy dreary solitude;
And thou my dear and lonely cell,
From whence I bade these scenes farewell,
The hand that did thy honours raise,
Would fain perpetuate thy praise;
For well, dear cell, has thou repaid
My labours with thy friendly shade;
Oft from th' unmeaning crowd I'd fly,
From fashion's vapid circle hie,
And beneath thy umbrage sought
The luxury of pensive thought,
Or view'd the moon's pale quivering ray,
Thro' thy woodbine portal play,
Or at the long expected hour,
Have flown to thee, dear conscious bower:
To catch (on some kind zephyr borne)
The welcome sound of post-boy's horn!
Impatient thro' thy foliage glance,
Impatient chid his slow advance;
Hear the dread "No," to my demand,
Yet fix'd remain with out-stretch'd hand,
With beating heart and eager eyes,
'Till hope in disappointment dies:
Or haply snatch th' expected bliss,
Print on each character a kiss;
Still on each tender sentence dwell,
While on each line a fond tear fell,
In which the fonder father prov'd,
How well his absent child was lov'd!
How true, how sweetly he could blend
In one, the sire, preceptor, friend.
* * * *
From listless solitude I fly
To meet the fond expectant eye;
Melt in a parent's warm embrace,
And in each fond endearment trace
The welcome of the throbbing heart,
Soft murmuring "No more we part."

Digitized by Google

Under the difficulties which resulted from her father's misfortunes, the subject of this memoir made her first literary essay in print. As Lady Morgan has herself acknowledged, in the Preface to "France," the world has been indebted to NECESSITY —that great parent of exertion—for the feast of pleasure which her writings have enabled it to taste.

In March, 1801, Sydney Owenson placed in the inky fingers of Mr. A. Stewart, Printer, 86, Bride-street, Dublin, the manuscript of a little volume of poems, juvenile and otherwise. "The verse in this book," observes one of the first, as well as one of the most fastidious of recent critics, "written before Byron had brought into existence the fresh rhythm and feelings of modern verse—is wondrously good of its kind—the time considered, and the preparations of its writer taken into account." This volume, the tiny book of a tiny author, was tolerably creditable to Mr. Stewart's press, if we except a few such awkward typographical oversights as "flutterer," for "flatterer," (p. 119); and wearied eyes, "half dozing," instead of "half closing on vacancy," (p. 29). Miss Owenson's means were too much pinched to enable her to cancel such leaves as contained matter which might, she thought, be altered for the better; and we find various passages in the printed copy, neatly modified in her own autograph. In the Hawthorne Tree, for instance, an obliterating line is lightly drawn through.

> "Nor olive by the ancients said
> Was sacred to the blue-ey'd maid!"

And

> "Nor Minerva's olive flower
> Sacred to wisdom's heavenly power!"

is substituted by the authoress. The great patroness

Digitized by Google

of literature in Ireland, at the close of the last, and the beginning of the present century, was Elizabeth, Countess of Moira; and to this high and accomplished lady little Sydney was graciously permitted to inscribe her maiden literary effort. "In sanctioning by your patronage," wrote Miss Owenson, "those little poetic sketches, you have conferred an honor on their author of which she is infinitely more sensible than capable of expressing the gratitude it has excited."

The Countess, though thoroughly English, by birth and descent, was filled by a hearty Irish nationality of feeling, from which too many members of the Peerage of Ireland have been invulnerably exempt. The daughter of Theophilus, Lord of Huntingdon and sole heir of her brother, on whose death, in 1789, she succeeded to the Hastings Peerage, in her own right, this illustrious lady became the third wife of the humane Earl of Moira. Her generous conduct in sheltering Lord and Lady Edward Fitzgerald, at the stormy period of 1798, as well as the uniform philanthropy and patriotism of her life, will long be remembered with gratitude in Ireland. Lady Moira died in 1808. Her once gorgeous residence, on Usher's Island, Dublin, is now the Mendicity Institution.

Mr., afterwards, Sir R. Philips, of St. Paul's Church-yard, undertook to conduct the publication and agency of Miss Owenson's book in London; but being the work of an utterly unknown author, it was deemed advisable to secure in advance, as many subscribers as possible. An alphabetical list was accordingly prefixed to the little volume, and it is interesting at this distance of time, to glance over it. The first name is that of Joseph Atkinson, M.R.I.A., an Irish poet, who, although famous enough at one

Digitized by Google

period, is probably better known now as the early friend of Dorothea Jordan, and Thomas Moore, who has celebrated his many social qualities in a poem to his memory. Burke Bethal, Barrister-at-Law, also figures—a man whose witty and convivial propensities have been quenched by death within the last few years only. In the C. division, we have Dr. Young, Lord Bishop of Clonfert, Sir Malby Crofton, Bart., and Abraham Colles, M.D. Of the first, we may observe that the discovery of a principle in natural philosophy which he applied to gunnery, introduced him to the notice of the military viceroy, Lord Cornwallis, and in 1798, he was presented by his Excellency with the See of Clonfert. Sir Malby Crofton, of whom we have already spoken, was said to have been a relation of Owenson's, and proved himself a dear friend through life to the interests of his daughter. The death of Dr. Abraham Colles in 1843, was an irreparable blow to suffering humanity; and caused a blank in the ranks of the medical profesion, which may not be for many years filled up. Among the other subscribers, were John Foster, last Speaker of the Irish House of Commons; Lord Granard, whose saturnine portrait Sir Jonah Barrington, introduces in his work on the Union; the Countess of Granard, the accomplished daughter of Lady Moira, Sir Duke and Lady Giffard; the patriot Duke of Leinster; the Countess of Moira; Sir Robert Lauder; Colonel King, M.P., afterwards Lord Lorton, who was tried for complicity in the murder of Colonel Fitzgerald, the base seducer of the beautiful Miss King; Thomas Moore, the poet of all circles—the idol of his own; Councillor M'Nally, who received a secret stipend from the Crown for betraying the professional secrets of the United Irishmen; Mrs. O'Beirne, of Ardbraccan

Digitized by Google

Palace, the wife of Louis, Lord Bishop of Meath, originally a Roman Catholic Ecclesiastical student; the Rev. Mr. O'Beirne, P.P. of Longford, the Protestant prelate's brother; Captain, afterwards the Right Hon. William Saurin, whose tedious political régime in Ireland was a national calamity, and the Rev. Dr. Millar, the subsequently celebrated author of the Philosophy of History. Many more names appear on record, but those we have enumerated are the only ones which at this distance of time, are recognizable.

The modest Preface of Sydney Owenson to her first-born book is pleasant to read, and repays the labour of transcription. The Preface is dated from "Dominick Street, Dublin." She wrote it when on a visit with Mrs. Lefanu, who resided at number 45 in that street. In her last introduction to "The Wild Irish Girl," Lady Morgan speaks of Mrs. Lefanu, the accomplished sister of R. B. Sheridan, as her earliest and dearest friend." The most literary house then open in Dublin was that of Mrs. Lefanu. She was not only literary in taste but also in talent. From a paper of the day we cull the following impromptu on a sparkling comedy of which Mrs. Lefanu was the author.

Dame Comedy so dull had grown,
She made the town in sadness moan,
Now to her native spirit true,
She treats us with a *laugh anew.*

But Mrs. Lefanu could also draw forth tears by her tragic powers. Moore reminds us that in 1790 she used to perform the part of Jane Shore at Lady Burrowe's Private theatre. The small Irish girl "her harp and howl," received some kind acts of attention and appreciation from Mrs. Lefanu. Her

Digitized by Google

maiden preface, which began as follows, was dated, as we have said, from this lady's house.

"The mind of a young author, on the eve of exposing to the gaze of the public scrutiny, the cherished offspring of its solicitude, 'with all its imperfections on its head,' seeks to strengthen its hopes and tranquillize its apprehensions, by adopting every idea which leads to the belief, that the errors of youth will meet with that indulgence in a literary sense, which in a moral one it never fails to obtain—and if there is indeed 'in youth a prone and speechless dialect such as moves men,' on this principle, at least, the author of this little volume may rest her claim to toleration. The fugitive trifles it contains, best evince in themselves the period in which they were written; many of them a young 'imagination bodied forth' in those truant hours which childhood loves to steal from enforced avocation, and many of them were the effusions of an heart newly awakened to happiness, or seeking to lose its little sorrows amidst the playful imagery of fancy's creation, faithful transcripts from local and interesting originals, they were composed under the influence of the feelings; and their author writing what she thought, rather than thinking what she should write, realized with rapidity the 'idle visions of her brain,' or veiled beneath the fantastic drapery of poetic decoration the natural simplicity of those sentiments, which her heart owned, and her understanding ratified."

The reader has a right to expect that we should lay some extracts from this little book before him. Of these there are, in truth, no dearth. Every imaginable object and situation seems to have formed the fair poetess's theme at various times; but we prefer to select such pieces as furnish an insight into Miss

Digitized by Google

Owenson's mode of life at the remote epoch in question. Not a few of her poems are entitled to the rank of autobiographical fragments. There is an unmistakeable air of truthfulness about them; and the cautious reader need not fear that Sydney had much need to indulge in Poets'-license.

In a piece, addressed "To Myself," an effort to cast off care is traceable. The authoress urges her active mind to retravel the scenes of happier bygone days.

Ah! little maid, how blest the day,
When with the frolic hours, you gay
and careless rov'd
Thro' life, from woe, from trouble free,
Nor thought you e'er could parted be,
from those you lov'd!

Thine was the blest propensity,
To make that world a heaven to thee,
in which you mov'd
Nor knew the cause that made thee blest,
That joy'd thy heart and warm'd thy breast,
was those you lov'd!

* * * * *

No thought of ill did ever scare,
Thy happy heart devoid of care.

No woe thy bosom did invade,
Save those thine own compassion made,
by pity mov'd;
You wept,—yet ne'er did sorrow know,
But taught to weep for other's woe.
by those you lov'd!

And while the tear stood in thine eye,
Or on thy cheek would trembling lie,
it often prov'd;
That smiles irradiated thy face,
As in the eyes you'd rapture trace,
of those you lov'd.

Digitized by Google

The gloomy art thou ne'er did'st know,
Of conjuring up ideal woe,
but sportive rov'd;
Thro' Fancy's brightest, gayest scene,
For happy wer't thou then I ween,
with those you lov'd!

Gay was thy prattle, gay thy smiles,
Thy infant sports, thy infant wiles,
still unreprov'd;
By age or chill severity,
Nor frowns repelling e'er did see,
from those you lov'd!

Full many were thy childish ways,
To charm the dear parental gaze;
fondly approv'd
Was each faint effort of thy mind,
While to thy little failings blind
were those you lov'd!

Ah! little maid, how blest the day,
When with the sportive hours, you gay
and careless rov'd
Thro' life!—alas! that day is o'er,
Since, little maid, art thou no more
with those you loved!

The experience of heavy affliction does not seem to have rendered the breast of Sydney Owenson callous to trifling trials. We now find her tender heart bemoaning the death of her favourite lap-dog, "Bell," which for "seven long years" was the constant companion of our little authoress. The introductory verse to eight succeeding stanzas, will probably be considered sufficient as a specimen:—

Since then thy life's "poor play is o'er,"
And thou cans't live to charm no more
who charmed so well;
Let me whose hours you oft beguiled,
Who at thy sportive ways oft smiled,
thy virtues tell.

Digitized by Google

The virtues and beauties of "a Thrush which sung every evening under the author's windows, during a summer residence in the country," are also cordially recognized and eulogised.

Miss Owenson's little volume of poems lay for a time unnoticed and unbought; but the influence of the Countess of Moira at length prevailed, and innumerable persons purchased it in obsequious obedience to her ladyship's earnestly expressed suggestion. Once tested, the genuineness of the gems became apparent; their value daily rose in critical estimation; it became fashionable to praise them. They furnished many a languishing boudoir and drawing-room conversation with a theme which seldom failed to stimulate; in the pauses of the Spanish dance, or the Minuet de la Cour, they were referred to with other topics of *ton*. At last the *élite* of Dublin expressed a desire to view the casket from whence such pretty pearls came; and Sydney Owenson was forthwith installed on a little throne, in the centre of the brightest society of the metropolis. Her wit and vivacity, the nerve with which she swept the strings of her harp, and the exquisite modulations of her voice, in accompaniment, charmed widely, and bound captive many a heart long wrapped in apathy. Local critics began to recognize "a considerable share of the poetic faculty" in the authoress's volume; she had talents of no mean order. Her fancy was graceful, and her verse flowing and harmonious. They had great hopes of the young poet, and augured a second edition for her volume.

Fluent and flowing as was Sydney's pen and thought, we find that her muse did not always prove as obedient as might be desired. The capricious lady—we mean the muse, *not* Miss Owenson—was at last addressed in the following strain of semi-

Digitized by Google

petulance, on the occasion of our authoress making a vain effort to write on a given subject:—

I swear it by Parnassus mount,
By Hippocranes' inspiring fount;
By Waters of Acidalus,
By sacred streams of Illysus;
By Helicon,—Castalian rill,
By Agannippe,—Pindus' hill;
Apollo's laurel, and his lyre,
Melpom'ne's tears,—Thalia's fire!
By wise Minerva's sagest owl,
By Royal Juno's sacred fowl;
By Ida's love-inspiring air,
Nay, by thy ingrate self I swear;
Ne'er from this moment to implore
Thy aid or inspiration more;
Nor sacrifice my youth's short day,
In begging a poetic lay;
Or wit to scribble song or sonnet,
When I should trim a cap or bonnet;
Entreat a spark of attie fire,
To animate my languid lyre,
When I as in my sex befitting,
Should take my work or mind my knitting!
For thee what have I not endured,
To scoffs, and taunts, and sneers inur'd;
By misses for thy favours maul'd,
By masters "learned lady" called!
By all avoided, lest my bite
Should set the simple things to write;
Whilst thou malignant more than they,
Hath some eccentric notion gay
Shot 'thwart my fancy—nay, I swear,
E'en in the sacred house of prayer,
I gladly seize it, thoughtless wight,
Forgot I came to pray, not write,
And in my prayer-book self indite!
While from my lips unconscious fall,
Nor sainted Peter, James, nor Paul;
But mount Parnassus, muses, fire,
Apollo, wit, Ionian choir;
Invoke no canonized maid,
But Yorick's or Cervantes shade!
Quick shrinks each pious soul away,
While sacred horror and dismay,

Digitized by Google

Each eye devout as quick invade,
Cast on the sacrilegious maid;
And tho' she prayed with might and main,
Alas! she finds contrition vain;
Nor credit gains from pious dame,
That you, sad Muse, not she's to blame;
Nor is this all, for oft with spleen
Thou'st darted on me, when I've been
In solemn convocation seated
'Midst female sages, who grave treated
On sermons, prudence, faith, and prayer,
Salves, conserves, silks, and china-ware!
Now flirting girls frail conduct chiding,
And now the price of lace deciding;
Now giving script'ral expositions,
Now quoting tradesmen's impositions!
Now on blest charity declaim,
And now traduce a neighbour's fame;
While as I solemn, prim, demure,
List' with attention to be sure,
Pop come you with poetic freak,
And on my prim attention break;
Breathe fire thro' the torbid creature,
And animate each cold fixed feature!
I start, look up, then seize a pen,
Write, smile, gaze round, and write again;
Then realize the golden thought,
And with enthusiasm fraught,
"Io Triumphe—there's a line
Will speak me favoured by the Nine!"
With look ecstatic, I exclaim,
And strike amazed each frigid dame;
O'erwhelmed with fear and consternation,
Straight they convene a consultation;
Of grandmamas and spinster cousins,
Step-sisters, maiden aunts in dozens;
With broken sentence, nod, and leer,
"Where more is meant than meets the ear;"
In whispers they converse and shew it,
The poor thing's mad, or worse, turn'd poet;"
Then vow they'd pardon any crime,
In their own girls, but love of rhyme,
Which should it epidemic prove,
Might well affect all those they love;
And spreading quick the cautioning rumour,
To exile from their presence doom her!
Yet all these evils I sustain'd,

Digitized by Google

Of persecution ne'er complain'd,
As long as thou wouldst kindly pay
A visit in a friendly way.

In this strain our little Poetess proceeds to reproach her muse with a tendency to unamiable desertion. She reminds her of the hours without number which were snatched from refreshing midnight slumber, and fervently devoted to her sake and service. She speaks of the youthful joys, "toilette, trinkets, dress, and toys—the dear short-lived teens best treasure,"—all sacrificed for the muse's sake. "And yet," she adds—

"You all these services forget,
Reject my incense, and despise
The votive off'rings I devise;
On my best invocation frown,
Nor with success one effort crown."

Sydney concludes in a strain of assumed petulance, forswearing

"—— book, paper, ink, and pen,
Until!—thou smil'st on me again."

It was often at the most unseasonable moments that the muse would turn caressingly to Sydney. Sometimes when in bed at night, wrapt in darkness, thought, and blankets, a gush of inspiration would saturate the little Poet's brain. She often drew down the vengeful indignation of the elder female members of the household, who could not at all understand why "Miss Siddy, instead of lying tranquilly on her pillow, would suddenly begin mouching about the house, and fumbling at the well-slacked kitchen fire," with a dripping tallow candle which refused to light. Sometimes, Sydney, rather than disturb the sleeping household, would scrawl hasty

Digitized by Google

hieroglyphic mems upon a big school slate which lay, awaiting the moment of inspiration, at her bed-side. At other times, when out walking, she would suddenly desert her companions, and seeking a secluded green field dotted with lambs, would there, in pastoral peace and purity, woo her muse.

It was not only by the volume of poems already spoken of, that Sydney Owenson proved herself the inheritress of her father's idiosyncracies and talents. We now find her arranging to English words, twelve of the most beautiful and touching melodies, in the vernacular of her native land, and filially dedicating the work to Robert Owenson. Prefixed to this very beautiful collection is an Historical Preface, written with eloquence and erudition, in which she attributes the patriotic tone which pervades her writings, to the national enthusiasm which at an early age she imbibed from her father.

Some persons may require to be reminded that to Miss Owenson we are indebted for the charming Irish ballad of "Kate Kearney." It first appeared anonymously as the "Beardless Boy;" and at once became popular. That Miss Owenson would have followed up the series there can be no doubt, had not Moore, Stevenson, Bunting, Lover and Holden grasped with avidity at the happy idea of which she was the parent. Although Bunting, as far back as 1796, gave substantial indications of a tendency to preserve our national airs, it was not until 1840, that we find him publishing that great body of Melody, entitled "The Ancient Music of Ireland," with which his name will be for ever bound. Miss Owenson may be said to have been the original starter of that happy thought for which Moore has almost always received the exclusive credit. But in the Preface to the first edition of his Melodies, he had too much

Digitized by Google

honour not to avow that her, "patriotic genius had been employed on some of our finest airs."

There was a regular scramble for this rich and profitable idea. Nor was the emulative race confined to native aspirants. From England and Scotland came Colman and Campbell, who bore off in triumph *Savourneen Deelish,* and "The Exile of Erin." Lover found some which Moore had failed to find—among others, "The Angel's Whisper," and "Rory O'More." But rich as was the harvest which these personages reaped in the field of Irish music, we find, from the recent and successful labours of Dr. Petrie, that those industriously disposed can still glean with profit in the same field.

Miss Owenson proved herself a real Poetess in this volume of Irish Melodies. A vivid fancy, with an imagination rich, natural and warm, sparkled and glowed in every page. Take, for example:—

Oh tell me sweet Kate, by what magical art
You seduced ev'ry thought, ev'ry wish of my soul?
Oh tell how my credulous, fond, doating heart,
By thy wiles and thy charms from my bosom was stole.

Oh whence, dangerous girl, was thy sorcery, tell,
By which you awak'ned love's tear, and love's sigh;—
In thy voice, in thy song, lurks the dangerous spell?
In the blush of thy cheek, or the beam of thy eye?

Her intense perception of the beautiful in nature is displayed in the illustrations of the following little Ballad:

My love's the fairest creature,
And round her flutters many a charm,
Her starry eyes, blue beaming,
Can e'en the coldest bosom warm:
Her lip is like a cherry,
Ripely sueing to be cull'd;
Her cheek is like a May rose
In dewy freshness newly pull'd.

Digitized by Google

Her sigh is like the sweet gale,
  That dies upon the violet's breast,
Her hair is like the dark mist,
  On which the evening sunbeams rest:
Her smile is like the false light
  Which lures the traveller by its beam;
Her voice is like the soft strain,
  Which steals its soul from passion's dream.

"Owenson," says the 'Freeman's Journal' of May 28th, 1812, in recording his death, "Owenson was the best Irish scholar of his day, and we may perhaps say, the last true Irish musician." These acquirements and intellectual tendencies have been perpetuated hereditarily. One well informed on the subject, writes: "The parodies of Lady Clarke, in the Irish vernacular set by Sir John Stevenson, long formed the *délices* of musical society in Dublin, which the author of these lines remembers to have heard her sing with infinite grace and humour." This striking hereditary musical taste has been further instanced by Lady Clarke's daughter, Mrs. Edward Geale, assisting the Marchioness of Downshire in forming an Irish Academy of Music.

The critical plaudits to which we have elsewhere alluded, nerved the tiny girl to renewed exertion. Mrs. Radcliffe's vigour, as a novelist, had begun to flag painfully. Miss Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw," and "The Scottish Chiefs" did not appear for some years later. Miss Edgeworth's *débût*, as a novelist, had not yet taken place. Clara Reeve, and Miss Burney were used up. Female romance-writers were few; and it seemed to Sydney Owenson that a favorable open lay before her. In 1802 appeared "St. Clair, or, the Heiress of Desmond, a novel, in two volumes, by Miss Owenson." Every chapter bears, more or less, trace of a tyro's hand; but the book, nevertheless, possesses, in many passages, a hearty

Digitized by Google

raciness of style, which cheers like the freshness of morning.

"St. Clair," however deficient in vigour of style, and objectionable in some points, is not entitled to absolute condemnation, insomuch as it seems to have been undertaken with the motive of writing down a romantic idea, then prevalent among the admirers of Continental Literature, namely—that the passion of Platonic love might subsist between the sexes without any approach to amatory affection. In order to shew the fatal effects of this romantic notion, St. Clair is drawn with all the sensibility of soul and refinement of sentiment with which the French and German authors of that day loved to invest their heroes. He is engaged by Lord L— to superintend the education of his children, and having proceeded to his lordship's seat in Connaught, St. Clair meets, for the first time, Olivia, the heroine of the tale, who resides with her grandfather, Sir Patrick Desmond, and is betrothed to his relation Colonel L—. Olivia and St. Clair on further acquaintance, discover in each other a congeniality of taste, and reciprocity of sentiment. They commence a correspondence, and while they imagine they indulge a Platonic passion only, gradually acquire a real one. In the meantime, Colonel L— arrives to claim his bride. Preparations are begun for the nuptials; the bride's dress is made, but while these and other matrimonial arrangements are in progress, Olivia and St. Clair meet in a summer house, for the purpose of taking an eternal farewell. The Colonel surprises them there in each other's arms, and forces St. Clair to fight, who expiates his sorrows with his life. Olivia, whose character is damaged, falls a prey to pulmonary consumption, and the

Digitized by Google

novel concludes with an impressive letter in which she confesses her errors and explains their cause.

In the topographically descriptive portions of "St. Clair," Miss Owenson embodied much of her Connaught experience. An old Sligo lady, in a letter before us, observes. "My brother who was serving his time with Doctor Henry of Market Street, Sligo, was a great playgoing young man, and well acquainted with Mr. Owenson. Being a ready writer, and having a good deal of idle hours in the doctor's shop, Mr. Owenson got him to copy Miss Sydney's first novel for the press, which was illegibly scribbled, and in unconnected scraps. She commenced the work in Dublin, and finished it in Sligo. I remember hearing her say that, when writing 'St. Clair,' she often regretted seeing the ladies walking out, and in gay conversation, while she was obliged to stay at home and toil. She thought once or twice of abandoning it for ever, but her father encouraged her to persevere, and by his encouragement she completed it."

Important after events often hinge on early trifles. Had not the apothecary's boy alleviated Miss Owenson's drudgery by transcribing and connecting the illegible manuscripts of her first novel, it is probable that in a moment of girlish fatigue or impatience, she would have abandoned such laborious literature for ever.

Greatly to the apothecary's chagrin, who found in "St. Clair" a much more agreeable "subject" than he was wont to handle—Miss Owenson found herself competent to construct her second novel without the aid of the pestle and mortar. "The Novice of St. Dominick," appeared in 1804. Its style is fresh and buoyant almost to puerillity, and the work contains many views to which we do not subscribe, but

Digitized by Google

the character of De Sorville helps to redeem some of the imperfections of the tale. The morality of his precepts, the persuasive eloquence of his arguments, and the noble generosity of his character, command respect. The too obvious effort, however, in the third and fourth volumes, to spin out the tale to the utmost possible length, spoils the *goût* which its perusal might otherwise produce. These works were far from being favorites with Lady Morgan when time had matured her judgment and style; and although bearing unmistakeable evidence of a want of knowledge of the world, together with great improbability of plot, we find, on consulting some contemporary criticisms, that "St. Clair" and the "Novice" were two very popular productions. The society of our authoress continued to be courted with avidity by fashionable circles—a further proof of her increasing prestige and success.

Through Lord Moira's influence, the peasant-poet Dermody, whom Owenson had so humanely befriended, received in 1802, a commission in the army. But Dermody became a prey to disease, and died soon after. Shortly before his death, he met Sydney Owenson for the first time, after a long absence; early reminiscences crowded upon him, and affected him visibly. These feelings partially found vent in a poetical letter which he sent to Miss Owenson.

In quoting a few lines we gather a fact:

When first too weak to grasp the laurel bough,
I wove a rosy chaplet for thy brow;
And, in its various hues, would idly trace,
Some flowery semblance of thy charming face;
Oft would the sweet seduction of thy smile,
Attune my numbers, and enrich my style;
Whate'er of fair, or perfect I designed,
Was merely copied from thy form and mind;

Digitized by Google

How oft have I beheld in rapturous trance,
Thy graceful steps adorn the sprightly dance;
* * * *
Hoarded with pious care within my breast,
Oh ever let thy dear idea rest;
There fixed, the silent, secret object be,
Of my poetical idolatry.

Dermody concludes a long poem with:

Waller once more may see his Sydney's name,
Revived in song, superior, and the same.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

Croker's "Familiar Epistles."—The Scourging Censor lashed in return.—Sir M. Crofton.—Tyreragh.—"The Wild Irish Girl" begun.—The Originals from whom the Characters were drawn. —State of Ireland prior to the publication of "The Wild Irish Girl."—The Search for a publisher.—Panic of Phillips.—Johnson's Generous Offer respectfully declined.—Peter Pindar's Suggestion.—Atkinson.—Lord Hardwicke.—Sydney Owenson assailed by the Castle Scribes.—Extracts from the Diatribes of M. T.—Defended by a "Son of Ireland."—William Pitt reads "The Novice of St. Dominick."

In 1804, an anonymous attack upon the "Present State of the Irish Stage," appeared in six Poetical Epistles, addressed to the then Patentee, Frederick Jones. Performers, dramatic writers, and every individual connected directly or indirectly with the theatre were subjected by the author to lacerating lashes of poignant sarcasm and invective. The style, although able, exhibited traces of a youthful hand: the endless display of Greek quotations, and classical lore, savoured of the new fangled learning of a successful collegian, while the internal evidence was of a character to convince the friends of a young Galway man, named John Wilson Croker, that nobody but he could have penned it. The coteries of cities are, unhappily, not averse to a brilliant bit of scandal, or a sparkling slander, and hence the book was eagerly read, and what was more to the purpose, bought.

Digitized by Google

People laughed and chuckled over the galling personality of the "Familiar Epistles," but it was not laughing gas alone that John Wilson Croker let loose among the coteries of Dublin. His work was a deadly shell, propelled with well calculated aim, which, in exploding, not only wounded many, but consigned some sensitive hearts to the shroud. The tomb-stone of the actor, Edwin, in St. Werburgh's church-yard, Dublin, records that "his death was occasioned by an illiberal and cruel attack on his professional reputation from an anonymous assassin." This was the barbed pen which sixteen years later stabbed Keats to death, and sought to fasten itself in Sydney Owenson's heart.

"The Familiar Epistles," became every day more and more spoken of. Edition after edition vanished with pantomimic rapidity, and the work has since held a high place for its acrimonious pith and point.

No arm but one in Dublin had the courage to grapple with this formidable assailant of reputations. In 1804, appeared "A Few Reflections" on the work alluded to, with the following quotation from Shakspeare as a motto.

> "No might or greatness in mortality,
> Can censure 'scape; back wounding calumny,
> The whitest virtue strikes. What King so strong,
> Can tie the gall up in the slandering tongue?"

The work was dedicated to Jones by the author, who added, "I am encouraged to present this trifle to you, as the smallest token of the respect and kindness I feel towards one, whose principal characteristics are those of being an indulgent and affectionate parent, and an honourable man." The initials signed to this dedication are "S. O." They are

Digitized by Google

rather unusual initials, and we think they can be considered applicable to but one person. The circumstance of Sydney Owenson's connection with the stage, through the parent whom she revered, was likely to have given her a peculiar interest in the subject, and from the chivalrous character of the woman, it is not surprising that she should have been the first to parry, and resent the attack. Some of her dearest friends were virulently assailed by Croker. The smile of the eminent *tragédienne* Miss Walstein (who had been a theatrical colleague of Owenson's) was cruelly compared to plating on a coffin. "She plays the gay parts of Miss Hardy tolerably," added young Croker, "because she plays them in a mask." Mrs. Siddons was satirised in the same breath, whilst the operatic dramas of Sydney Owenson's early patron and fast friend, Mr. Atkinson, were pronounced "a strange collection of stupid and often indecent vulgarisms on which Sir John Stevenson threw away some very good music." All this Miss Owenson is likely to have resented; the florid character of the style reminds us of her early writings. Some very learned classical quotations are, it is true, introduced; but Miss Owenson's works have occasionally contained similar references. The French citations from La Fontaine, and others of which the authoress was so fond, are freely introduced, while the almost identity of many passages* in the

* Take, for instance, the concluding remark, in which the author declares that "it was not undertaken with the intention of displaying genius, but merely from the necessity of defending innocence—a necessity whose dictates I shall be ever proud to obey, and upon the remembrance of which I chiefly depend *for indulgence to its many faults from* THAT *Public whose generosity* prevailing over their criticism, will blind them to the execution while it reminds them of the intent." Does not the style of this paragraph recall a passage in Lady Morgan's Preface to "Salvator

Digitized by Google

acknowledged and unavowed writings of Sydney Owenson leave little room to doubt that she, and no one else, wrote the book.

Frederick Jones, soon after, brought forward a little play of Miss Owenson's entitled "The First Attempt" and gave her up the entire receipts of the house; Atkinson wrote a poem on the subject, appealing to the public to encourage her play. These and other circumstances which might be cited suggest that both considered themselves under some obligation to the little authoress. Croker's "Familiar Epistles" moreover, seem to have left a very clear impression on Lady Morgan's mind, for, in the edition of her "Wild Irish Girl," published in 1857, she particularly refers to some personally sarcastic poems, which appeared in her young days, and adds, "the supposed author of the best and bitterest of these occasional poems (for which there was no occasion) the Gentil Bernard of the Dublin Blues was—the future secretary of the Admiralty and awful editor *in petto* of the Quarterly Review, who lisped in numbers —and the numbers came." The authorship of the "Reflections" on Croker's "Familiar Epistles" has never hitherto been attributed to Miss Owenson, but there can be, we conceive, no question, that to her pen its existence is owing. We also rather think that the origin of Croker's deathless spite

Rosa?"—*i.e.* "I now dismiss my first attempt at biographical writing *and commit it to the indulgence of* THAT *Public* which is the sole umpire for whose suffrage an author should be solicitous." And again in her Preface to "France."—"Whilst I thus endeavour to account for faults I cannot excuse, and to solicit *the indulgence of* THAT PUBLIC from whom I have never experienced severity, &c." Her letter to the Reviewers contains a similar passage, "I cannot take my leave of THAT PUBLIC to which I have appealed without offering acknowledgments for its *indulgence.*"

Digitized by Google

against his fair countrywoman, may be dated from this period.

The author begins by saying that "before examining 'The Familiar Epistles,' I found it to be an entire contradiction of that candid inquiry which from the familiarity of its title, I was led to expect. Hoping that it would have been answered by some abler hand, I remained in silent expectation, but alas! none such appearing; at length, I was induced to take the task upon myself and trust my ideas to the candour of the public, rather as a friend of virtue than an advocate for fame."

A vigorous argumentative tone pervaded the body of the work. "It was ever my opinion" observes the author, "that criticism consisted in a just investigation into the merits of a performance and not in a close inquiry of the private character of the individuals composing such; I did suppose that it was held as too noble to be perverted to the meanness of personality, or used but as the cover of abuse. Impressed with this idea, I expected an impartial examination of ability and talent, and not a minute inquiry after vice;—I did expect to hear the actor censured, but not the man abused;—I did expect to see laid down the keen observations of the man of sense and true judgment, not the gross language of heated animosity, or the acrimony of personal hate. Scarce a leaf I opened, but I found the characters of our performers virulently attacked, and misrepresented, and the whole tenor of the work, seemingly designed for no other earthly purpose than to make them appear hideous in the eyes of a public, on whose approbation they must depend for any success in their arduous profession, and maintenance through life."

Miss Walstein, it may be remembered, was, for

Digitized by Google

some time, a theatric colleague of Owenson's. It was evidently a friendly hand, which penned such lines as these: "Were it only to display in the language of naked truth the excellencies of this lady's dramatic character, my task would then be easy; but to ward off the ungenerous attack of seemingly inveterate hatred against female merit requires something more than the dignified silence of contempt, or the consciousness of unstained virtue * * He complains of her performing too much, and not keeping within the circles of those characters in which she is allowed to excel; but this is not the effect of any ill-timed vanity in her; it arises from the want of other actresses to fill these parts which she obligingly undertakes, and likewise as the forfeiture for the refusal of a part is five guineas, it might not be quite so convenient for Miss Walstein to pay that sum every time her own wish prompted her to refuse playing."

The third edition of Mr. Croker's work, published in 1805, condescended to notice the sound and pertinent "Reflections occasioned by a perusal of the 'Familiar Epistles.'" Owenson, not having been on the stage since 1798, was exempted from the lash with which Croker tortured the various performers of the Dublin Theatre. Owenson, at this period, was endeavouring to earn a livelihood by carrying on the trade of a wine and spirit merchant in Fleet Steeet, Dublin.

Throughout the year 1805, Miss Owenson's pen was not idle. Practice makes perfect, and in trying her hand on a third novel, she contrived to avoid a considerable portion of the blemishes of style and taste which had previously exposed her to adverse criticism. A short narrative of the origin and progress of that highly romantic novel which threw the

Digitized by Google

friends of Sydney Owenson into an ecstacy of admiration, may not be irrelevant.

In 1805, she revisited Sligo and the adjacent scenes of her early joys and sorrows. In the barony of Tyreragh, and the deeply romantic shores of the Western coast of Ireland, beaten by the waves which roll in unbroken from Labrador, Miss Owenson's imaginative mind found ample scope for its musings, at the most impressionable epoch of human existence. It is interesting to know that "The Wild Irish Girl" was actually written among the scenes, the circumstances, and the people it describes. The story originally made an episode in a ponderous journal, kept by little Sydney from her school days upwards, as a means of communing with herself, simply because she had no one else to commune with, who understood her, in "her own way." The accidents of remote Connaught cousinship with the family of Sir Malby Crofton gave her singular and obvious advantages. She spent several months under the hospitable roof of Longford House, and thus gained opportunities of graphically depicting, not only the wild and romantic scenery of the surrounding region, but of studying the graceful person, and endearing idiosyncracies of Sir Malby's accomplished daughter Elizabeth, afterwards Mrs. Colonel Norcote of Sligo. There can be no objection to now announcing the fact that this lady formed the prototype of Glorvina in "The Wild Irish Girl," while the fictitious portrait of Glorvina has been said to have suggested the Diana Vernon of "Rob Roy." A magazine paper of 1825, attributed to Sir Charles Morgan, observes, "In 'The Wild Irish Girl' there is an air of delightful originality, and it has been asserted, with some reason, that it was this work which gave rise to the Scotch novels. The 'great

Digitized by Google

unknown' has said otherwise; but, if Miss Edgeworth were his model, it is somewhat extraordinary that he has never attempted to imitate her. Her works are transcripts of the present day—his of the past. Diana Vernon's resemblance to the Irish chieftain's daughter is rather too remarkable in many points, to be accidental."

Father John, the chaplain of the Prince of Coolavin, was modelled on the character of the then Catholic Dean of Sligo, Dr. Flynn, "One," observed Lady Morgan, forty years afterwards, "of those learned, liberal, and accomplished gentlemen of the Irish Catholic hierarchy of that day, whom foreign travel and education, and consequent intercourse with European society and opinions, sent back to Ireland for its advantage and illustration; thus turning the penalties of its shallow and jealous government into a national benefit!" Lady Morgan does not seem to know that Doctor Flynn's genius and virtues led to his elevation in 1812, to the Episcopal see of Achonry. He was a man of imposing aspect, and of almost giant mould. Sligo, forty years since, was a stronghold of sectarian bigotry: and one night, a party of low Orangemen with passions maddened by a recent debauch, remained at the angle of a road for the purpose of waylaying the Popish Dean. Dr. Flynn was happily provided with a blackthorn stick, which he wielded with such effect that half a dozen of his assailants measured their length upon the ground. There can be little doubt that Doctor Flynn also suggested that good country priest with the continental bow who treads "the stage of Florence M'Carthy."

From the legends of the ancient and once potential families of Macdermott's of Moylurg, the most romantic incidents and traditional allusions

Digitized by Google

of the story were derived. The name assumed by the founder of this chivalrous sept was Diamod, or Macdermott, which as Mr. D'Alton reminds us, signifies "The God of War."

In the Autobiography of A. Hamilton Rowan, there is an authentic conversation reported between Lord-Chief-Justice Clonmel and Mr. P. Byrne, Bookseller of Grafton Street, curiously illustrative of the unconstitutional terrorism which the executive of that day systematically exercised over the publishers of books having a patriotic or liberal tendency. Mr. Byrne having advertised the Trial of Hamilton Rowan for publication in 1793, was accosted non-officially by the Lord-Chief-Justice and informed, "If you print or publish what may inflame the mob, it behoves the judges of the land to notice it," and again, "Take care, Sir, what you do: I give you this caution, for if there are any reflections on the judges of the land, by the eternal G—I will lay you by the heels." The publisher replied, "I have many thanks to return your lordship for your caution!"

Such grossly irregular interference of the Irish executive, soon reduced the publishing trade of Dublin to a state of almost utter prostration; and we are not surprised to hear from Lady Morgan many years afterwards, that, "At the moment the 'Wild Irish Girl' appeared, it was dangerous to write on Ireland, hazardous to praise her, and difficult to find a publisher for an Irish tale which had a political tendency. For even ballads sung in the streets of Dublin, had been denounced by government spies, and hushed by Castle sbirri; because the old Irish *refrain* of Eiren go Bragh, awakened the cheer of the ragged, starving audience, who had much better have raised the chorus of 'Eiren go

Digitized by Google

Bread.' Graves were then still green, where the victims of laws, uselessly violated, were still wept over by broken hearts; and the bitter disappointment of a nation's hopes, by the recent and sudden desertion of Pitt, the most powerful champion of Catholic Emancipation, which gave to ascendency new power, and sunk Catholicism in deeper despondency, was only slowly yielding to the benign influence of a new and liberal administration of Irish affairs, during the temporary return to power of the Whigs, under the vice-royalty of the Duke of Bedford." No work, however, of fictitious narrative, founded on national grievances, and borne out by historic fact, had yet appealed to the sympathies of the general reader, or found its way to the desultory studies of domestic life. Miss Owenson having opened communication with Sir R. Philips of St. Paul's Church-yard, the publisher of her first born literary bantling, he not only consented to bring out "The Wild-Irish Girl," but to pay something considerable for the privilege. Philips, however, had no sooner examined the work, than a panic filled his usually impassive temperament. "The sentiments enunciated," he said, "are too strongly opposed to the English interest in Ireland, and I must withdraw from my original offer." This hitch in the negociation raised the Irish blood of the ardent young novelist to—as she herself said—bog-heat; she indignantly remonstrated, but all to no effect. The work was offered to various publishers, and rejected by all until Mr. Johnson of St. Paul's Church-yard, who had published the novels of Miss Edgeworth, offered the delighted and astonished girl three hundred guineas, with some extra sum upon future editions for the copyright.

As soon as the M.S. was forwarded to Johnson

Digitized by Google

his neighbour, Sir R. Philips, hearing of the circumstance, became a prey to professional remorse and jealousy, and having brought some local and trade influences to bear upon Johnson, he urged his prior claim to the "Wild Irish Girl" with such force, that he absolutely succeeded in rescuing and regaining her. The original title of the book was "the Princess of Inismore;" but Doctor Wallcott, better known as Peter Pindar, having obligingly stood literary sponsor, strongly advised Sydney Owenson to give her volume the epithet by which it has since been so widely and favourably known. "From that moment," recently observed Lady Morgan, in noticing the circumstance, "the author *prit son parti,* and in selecting Celtic heroes for her Irish tales, and the public's delectation, she stuck to Saxon publishers for her private interests. The O'Donnels, the O'Briens and the O'Flaherties were fancy men; but the Philipses, the Longmans, and the Colburns have been her *cavalieri paganti.*"

"The Wild Irish Girl," did not become immediately popular in London, but it soon crossed the sea to that native region, of which it was so racy, and in a short time few Dublin drawing-rooms were without it. To the silent study, also, this little tale became no stranger. Many masculine minds, fatigued beneath the weight of daily accumulating legal lore, sought "The Wild Irish Girl" for relaxation, and although they at first took it up merely in the hope of enjoying a laugh at Miss Owenson's romance, and possibly at her expense, they soon found eye and heart rivetted to the page by subtle political argument. There had been a long and painful pause in the once uninterrupted flow of Irish national Literature; the fire of Emmet's

Digitized by Google

patriotism had been extinguished in his own blood. The rush of his eloquence, which continued even on the scaffold, had been cut short by the axe. Moore had not yet devoted his genius to the poetry of politics, nor sung the wrongs of Ireland to her own touching melodies, "thus awakening sympathies," as Lady Morgan herself said, "which reason could not rouse, and making the ear a passage to the heart and understanding." Doctor Doyle and Sheil, were still at school, Davis was not born, the outburst of O'Connell's wrathful eloquence had not yet reverberated through the land. The Catholic Association was yet to awaken public opinion from the torpor of reiterated disappointment and hope deferred. It had not yet allayed the pangs of despair, nor accustomed the dull ear of a powerful oligarchy to the clanking of penal chains, or to the voice of remonstrance!

A tempest of violent misrepresentation and rancour had long raged unchecked against Catholic interests. It became fashionable to exult in the violation of the treaty of Limerick, and to sneer down the just claims of the Catholics. Many highly cultivated intellects proved not exempt from the political contagion. The mind of the Right Hon. George Ogle author of "Molly Asthore," and "Bannows Banks," became so sadly warped that we find him in 1802 coarsely asserting "a papist would swallow a false oath as easily as I would a poached egg." Miss Owenson's godfather Ned Lysaght urged Mr. Coyle, a Roman Catholic, to challenge the Privy Councillor. Four shots having been interchanged without effect, Lysaght compelled Ogle to write an apology on the crown of his hat. This was among the first efforts made by the long down-trodden Catholics of Ireland to regain their feet, and to wrest the scourge from the grasp of their tormentors.

Digitized by Google

The tempest of Orange calumny was at its height when "The Wild Irish Girl," bounded airily into the midst of it. Her tiny voice was heard above the storm, she appealed to reason, and reason fell captive before her!

Joseph Atkinson, M.R.I.A., one of the early patrons of Sydney Owenson's youthful genius, read "The Wild Irish Girl," with feelings of singular pride and pleasure. In the fullness of this feeling he threw off the following complimentary poetic address to Miss Owenson. We are unwilling to omit a line of verses written with such force, beauty, and truth. Critics of the present day will probably declare that the latter ennobling characteristic is hardly applicable to Atkinson's judgment on the crude novels of "St. Clair," and "The Novice;" but, as we already observed, they were strangely popular at the time. No one laughed more heartily at their undisciplined and puerile romance than Lady Morgan herself, as soon as experience of the world, and ample mental culture, had rendered sound her thought and style.

Whilst you with genius, and with patriot fire
The love of Erin in our hearts inspire,
Combine tradition with historic lore,
To prove her glorious deeds and worth of yore,
Our time shall hail you champion of her cause,
And future ages sanction our applause.
"St. Clair" first deckt you with a laurel crown,
"The Novice" next bestow'd more high renown;
"The Irish Girl" a triple wreath shall give,
And, like our shamrock, ever-blooming live!
A nation's gratitude shall twine the band
To grace your temples, and your fame expand!
While we with sympathizing souls bewail
The prince of Inismore's pathetic tale.
Thus while you rescue Erin's ancient race
From prejudice, contempt, and false disgrace,
O may the offspring of her present days
Aspire to emulate the worth you praise,

Digitized by Google

While Education, nurs'd by Freedom's smile,
Spread Arts and Science thro' this favourite isle,
And may the genial scene your fancy paints
Descend from Heav'n to bless the Land of Saints!
And as in rapture o'er your Harp we dwell,
Which you, like fair Glorvina, tune so well!
And hear a voice like her's that sweetly sings,
Warbling responsive to the minstrel strings—
And whilst we trace in this accomplish'd maid
The taste and science former times display'd,
Her filial love, her virtues so correct,
Born to secure esteem and fond respect.
We can no longer doubt the picture true,
For sure Glorvina lives reviv'd in you;
And to complete the moral story told,
May you another Mortimer behold!

The Castle scribes seem to have speedily received instructions to raise a reactionary shout, and fling ridicule upon "The Wild Irish Girl." The Viceroy, Lord Hardwicke, was a mild and moderate man, whose only weakness consisted in sometimes suffering Lord Castlereagh, the Lord Chancellor Redesdale, and other virulent opponents of Catholic Emancipation to interfere somewhat irregularly with the Government of Ireland.

The "Freeman's Journal" with other leading Dublin newspapers of this period were in the habit of receiving large sums from the Government, for the insertion of verbose proclamations which flowed almost uninterruptedly from the Castle: and although the 'Freeman' had popular tendencies, its policy, owing to the circumstance alluded to, occasionally vacillated until the successive editorial régimes of Messrs. Staunton, and Lavelle placed it upon a steady basis of principle. Shortly after the publication of "The Wild Irish Girl," the first of a series of clever and insidious letters against it and the authoress were prominently inserted by the editor of the "Freeman's Journal," a gentleman whom Watty Cox and Dr.

Digitized by Google

Brennan frequently satirised under the name of "Con, the Daggerman." Brennan used, monthly, to favour his readers with extracts from "Con's Diary" such as

> "Rose at six, and cleaned my shoes
> Miss Walstein's chariot did abuse,
> Wrote two hours against the town,
> Five men's honest fame run down.
> Dressed in black, and breeches satin,
> In the 'Freeman,' slandered Grattan." &c.

The writer signed himself M. T.: but this was probably one of the many of the letters pseudonyme which the late John Wilson Croker used to employ. As the foremost writer of that party which Miss Owenson had trenchantly attacked and exposed, Mr. Croker was very likely to have retaliated upon her in his own favourite fashion of anonymous slashing-criticism. Very wily means were resorted to, in order to obscure the attractive brightness of Miss Owenson's youthful genius, and to damage her fame and name, in the estimation of even her own political friends. The organ of Miss Owenson's own party was, therefore, triumphantly selected as the medium for disseminating a series of virulent, implacable, and extremely clever diatribes against "The Wild Irish Girl" and its gifted author. Under date, December 15, 1806, we find the first of these elaborate productions on record. Her assailant proceeded, in true legal fashion, first, to read the indictment, and then to enlarge upon it. "I accuse Miss Owenson," he said, "of having written bad novels, and worse poetry—volumes without number, and verses without end. Nor does my accusation rest upon her want of literary excellence. I accuse her of attempting to vitiate mankind—of attempting to undermine morality by sophistry, and that under the insidious mask

Digitized by Google

of virtue, sensibility and truth." A column followed of which the reader has had a sample. On January 2nd, 1807, we find M. T. returning to the charge, and with two columns more, seeking to overwhelm Miss Owenson utterly. He also endeavours to weaken, by a flippant paragraph of anticipation, the species of retaliation which his attack on Miss Owenson would probably provoke. "I will be accused of having attacked with coward pen, a helpless; unprotected female, of the atrocious attempt to injure infant fame and delicate sensibility—every eye will shed a crystal tear for the martyred authoress. I will be abused with all the elegant lavishness of sorrow, and all the fashionable volubility of woe—I will be impeached in every sigh, and sentenced in every whisper." After much "make-ready—present—fire," to this effect, M. T. then proceeds to discharge his volley. "In this lady's productions I view the most dogmatical self-opinion, the most menacing array of contradiction, laying down rules with the imperative mandate of a law giver," and again, "I call upon the parental or the appointed guardians of youth, I require them to peruse the work, and then pronounce their unequivocal judgment on its merits. If they find one page which will act towards the increase of moral rectitude, one voluntary contribution to virtuous feeling, or uncontaminated truth, I will not only qualify my assertions with doubt, but retract them with denial."

M. T. foresaw that Miss Owenson would not be without defenders, but he soon found that he had failed to anticipate a tithe of the retaliation to which his ungenerous conduct exposed him. On January 3rd, a writer, under the signature of "a Son of Ireland" entered the lists with him. "I have always observed," he wrote "that in proportion as genius or merit of any sort happens to prevail, envy and ig-

Digitized by Google

norance take the alarm: foolishly supposing, that by waging war with distinguished characters, they acquire, at least, a reflected reputation. And I have likewise observed that in men of contracted minds, there ever lurks a secret and narrow jealousy of those ladies, whose studies and superior understandings, have procured them the approbation of the learned, and the esteem of the wise. Conscious of his inferiority, but unwilling to acknowledge it, the puny pretender to wit is prompt to undervalue the talent that can detect, and, if necessary, expose his insufficiency." "The Son of Ireland," whom we suspect to have been Charles Kendal Bushe, likened Miss Owenson's assailant to the angry Arab, who in hurling a pebble at a pyramid, confessed the elevation of the object and the imbecility of his own arm.

"It is not with genius only," he continued, "that M. T. is at war. The morality of our young but instructive novelist, gives him unpardonable offence: and 'The Wild Irish Girl' he will send to the House of Correction, where she is to be stripped and scourged for presuming to inculcate the moral of benevolence, and the extinction of sectarian differences.* * But before M. T. had proceeded to question the morality of others, it had been but decent in him to examine his own. That heart cannot be perfect, which would rob genius of its fair reputation, and industry of its honorable rewards. M. T. should have recollected that Miss Owenson has the important charge of some young ladies whose education is committed to her care, that her morality as much as her genius is one of the roads which lead to her fame as a writer, and an instructress of youth."* "The Son of Ireland" in his concluding remark, somewhat uninten-

* In the "Freeman" of January 6th, 1807, appears a little paragraph from Miss Owenson, mentioning that "The gentleman

Digitized by Google

tionally bore evidence to the indelibly favourable impression, which even one interview with Sydney Owenson rarely failed to produce. "I never but once was in her company: nor does she at this moment know that I am defending her from as feeble an adversary as ever I remember to have encountered. But after what I have written, should M. T (if indeed he be a man) renew his attack on the lady, or notice me in your paper, I shall consider and brand him as the incorrigible enemy of Female genius. He should remember that she is a woman, and has a claim, if not to his politeness, at least upon his humanity—that while the gallantry of an Irishman is ever proportioned to his strength, the unkindness of M. T. proclaims his impotence: that Miss Owenson has been her own, and only tutor, and that her opportunities for study have been few and limited—very unequal to those academic advantages which men alone can attain."

M. T. seemed to have winced very uneasily under the rebuke administered by "The Son of Ireland," but instead of disarming the critic's hostility, it rather inflamed his spleen the more. That he wrote a private letter to the "Freeman's Journal" breathing sentiments of irritation, and injured innocence, we infer from the following notice to Correspondents: "M. T. (we shall only inform him) will have a fair opportunity of recriminating on Miss Owenson."

This little paragraph elicited from the friends of the authoress, a number of expostulations and remonstrances with which they continued for several days to pursue the luckless editor of the 'Freeman,' who now discovered that he had involved himself in somewhat of a difficulty. On January 9th, he writes:

who so kindly became her advocate must have been misinformed when he says that she is an instructress of youth in the acceptation of the word."

Digitized by Google

"Do the defenders of this lady really imagine that we are inimical to her interests and her fame, because we receive strictures upon her productions. They are wrong; we neither know the lady nor her connections—nor do we desire to know them—we never read any of her novels, nor do we purpose to read them. The lady may be respectable, and from the sphere in which she is said to move, we do not question it; her novels may be excellent, but of her excellence we do not pretend to judge." These remarks not being strong enough, the editor on reflection, added: "From what we have collected in conversation, we are inclined to give her ample credit for a very large share indeed of merit as a novelist, *and as a moral and excellent woman*. Let this satisfy some anxious inquirers; but they are extremely misguided if they think that any idle bluster or impertinent swagger shall induce us to withhold a single line."

On January 17th, M. T. returned to his unworthy labour, and with considerable irony went on to taunt "The Son of Ireland" for having dared to place his shield between Miss Owenson and her assailant. "There never was a composition," he wrote, "which bore so little the character of reply. Indeed, it seems to me as if the author was undetermined which side of the question he ought to take, or what line of augument he should pursue; sometimes abusive: then conciliating—in one sentence defying my wrath—in another mendicant for my pity—in short, Sir, were it not that the public might misconstrue silence into assent, I should have passed over this silly epistle without notice or comment." The anonymous Critic proceeded to wield his cutlass pen with a vigour strongly suggestive of a Quarterly Reviewer in the days of the old Tory régime; and after having given expression to a tissue of acrimonious criticism, longer than a leader

Digitized by Google

of the "Times" or a review in the "Athenæum," M. T. concluded. "Let them beware, unpalatable as my former communications may have been, the succeeding ones may acquire some additional acidity. I will pursue the even tenor of my way regardless of scurillity and defying abuse. Conscious of the purity of the motives by which I am actuated, I will not recede from the prosecution of this undertaking, until I shall have convinced the public of the correctness of my original assertion as to the tendency of Miss Owenson's works. I will examine impartially, and argue dispassionately. If I err, I will acknowledge error, but no threat shall have power to frighten me into silence while I can render up my humble mite to virtue, by pointing out vice concealed under her trappings, with the semblance of feeling and the mimicry of truth."

"These animadversions," said Lady Morgan long after, in alluding to the circumstance, "must have placed me under the ban of social and literary presumption for ever, but for the timely championship of some of my gallant and liberal countrymen."

"The Wild Irish Girl," however, was buoyed up into notice by the very means taken to sink it. The Rev. Richard Frizelle, in the very amusing local satire published by him in 1807, entitled "The Law Scrutiny or Attorney's Guide," furnishes a conclusive illustration of this remark. "For two or three days," he writes, "I found considerable difficulty to get the 'Freeman's Journal' (the paper I usually read) from my wife and daughters, who, while it was filled with election advertisements and French Bulletins, surrendered it to my exclusive perusal. 'Let me see,' said I, 'what is this that occupies your attention?' and they pointed out a letter signed M. T. I read it, and then for the first time determined to read the book it calumniated. On an impartial

Digitized by Google

perusal of both, I was certain of one of two things, viz. either that Miss Owenson herself abused the work to expedite the sale (which however stood in need of no such artifice) or that my Lord C—t—h, and the Right Hon. Mr. F—— employed a hireling scribbler to damn a work which, notwithstanding all his Lordship did to degrade his country, had the impudence to exhibit in its pages the ancient respectability, consequence and splendour of the Irish nation, and to throw impediments in the way of Mr. F——, to banish from the land the only faithful animal it seems to contain. My first opinion preponderated, till a second or third of these letters, descending to personal invective, completely banished it and left the last impressed on my conviction."

The influential parties to whom the Reverend Richard Frizelle alludes, were the notorious Viscount Castlereagh, chief extinguisher of the Irish Parliament, and the Right Hon. Mr. Foster who had fallen into some popular odium by imposing a tax upon dogs. Miss Owenson had been from her earliest youth,—when "Bell" was her constant companion—a warm admirer of the canine tribe, and she eloquently resisted the attempt to extirpate it.

If the editor of the "Freeman" gave insertion to the insidious letters of M. T., he had the manliness to throw open his columns to every species of defence, which the friends of Miss Owenson felt disposed to offer on her behalf. But it is an old remark that no matter with what power slanders may be refuted, a portion of the dirt is certain to adhere, and there can be no doubt that from this moment many persons adopted an impression unfavourable to Miss Owenson which was never afterwards effaced. The next champion whom we find entering the lists in the cause of "The Wild Irish Girl" is Dr.

Digitized by Google

Hoadley of St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. "I am an old fellow," he writes, "and have perhaps some old fashioned notions, but still, I think, I can distinguish between right and wrong, and as M. T's letter appears to me to be peculiarly improper, you will allow me to trouble you with a few observations upon it. The lady is the daughter of an old friend of mine; you may think therefore with what feeling I read any animadversions upon her works. I immediately sent to purchase them, and while the servant was absent, my sister Bridget and I considered the letter attentively. She would have "M. T." to stand for *malicious thrash*, because, she said, she knew the lady perfectly well whose unaffected elegance of manners, and amiable suavity of disposition rendered her at once interesting and agreeable, and whose superior and uncommon charms of person attracted unusual admiration. You know, Sir, how women will talk. For my part, I thought M. T. were the initials of Moses Tomkins, who was convicted some time ago of uttering treasonable expressions. How you, Sir, could insert such a clumsy and malignant farrago, how you could suffer the lady's name to be placed in large roman characters as a title to such ribaldry, is truly astonishing. But everything is changed since my time. I recollect when a regard for truth, and a respect for the sex, were principles very generally diffused; but now they are lost—extinguished in the chaotic revolution which has not only survived the aspect of politics and war, but even changed our manners, and subverted our morals." Dr. Hoadley, in conclusion, challenged the world to examine Miss Owenson's writings, and defied them to find

> "One immoral, one corrupted thought,
> One line which, dying, she could wish to blot."

Digitized by Google

One of Miss Owenson's friends had made the assertion, that the last book perused by William Pitt in the course of the long period of prostration which preceded his death was "The Novice of St. Dominick." This M. T. indignantly denied. "The last hours of the great man's memorable existence," he said, "were spent in acts of devotion, in christian penitence and consolatory prayer, in appealing with the confidence of virtue for mercy to that God whose dictates he never ceased to obey." Giffard's "Life of Pitt," however, had not then revealed (page 806) that when the Bishop of Lincoln went to the dying statesman's bedside, and requested leave to read prayers, he replied, that he had neglected prayer too much to have any ground for hoping in its efficacy on a death-bed.

A punning-prop next came to the support of Sydney Owenson's "*sinking reputation!*" On January 19, 1807, appeared some doggerel lines headed "Advice to M. T."

> *Empty*, why declare your name
> Th' initials were so near the same,
> That 'twas impossible to doubt
> Although three letters you left out.
> When you attack this author lass
> Your arguments perhaps might pass
> For reasoning sound, were it not known
> The source from whence the venom's flown.

The declaration of M. T. that his analysis of Miss Owenson's claims to public favour, would be conducted in a manner strictly "dispassionate and impartial," was very naturally received with suspicion. A writer, under the signature of J. L.—probably the subsequently famous "Honest Jack Lawless"—wrote: "Her works have been the subject of public disquisition, and with the public it remains to judge

Digitized by Google

whether the criticism of M. T. will be 'dispassionate and impartial;' let him divest himself of all personal prejudice before he enters on a task which will be submitted to the strictest scrutiny, and on which depends his fate; whether in undertaking it he will be found actuated by the laudable motives of a philanthropist, or become liable to the detection of being a slanderer of private reputations."

The ill-natured critic, having met more resistance than he had bargained for, would seem to have been somewhat at a loss to determine what tactics next to pursue. He had exhausted his quiver of poisoned arrows, and must needs make some delay in order to replenish it. During this interval, the editor of the "Freeman" reprinted the entire of what M. T. had previously written against Miss Owenson, but continued, as before, to give her the benefit of every argument and retort which the friends of the authoress thought fit to offer.

On January 23rd, appeared a long letter, professing to have been written by a perfectly impartial observer of the controversy, but which contained more than one passage suggestive of the suspicion that the writer may have been briefed by Miss Owenson herself. The following extract from Voltaire heads the letter. How fond the authoress always was of quoting Voltaire, we need not remind the reader. "Ces petits livres de critique, ces brochures périodiques où des hommes incapables de rien produire, dénigrent les productions des autres,—je les compare à certains moucherons, qui vont déposer leurs œufs dans le derrière des plus beaux chevaux, mais cela ne les empêche pas de courir." The writer then proceeds to address "Mr. Editor."

"I am a young fellow about town, and Fate or Fortune (for I must not use so old-fashioned a phrase

as Providence) having placed me above the actual necessity of earning my bread by the sweat of my brow, I kill time (Fashion forbids me to say I employ it) in a desultory pursuit of literature, and in the conversation of a few friends, as unreflecting, as eccentric, and as indolent as myself. Now, you are to know, Sir, that my friends and I have been egregiously edified by certain strictures on the literary offspring of Miss Owenson, which have appeared in your paper, under the signature of M. T. This modern Aristarchus having conceived a notion, that the aforesaid offspring were not altogether so well behaved as might be wished, has subjected them to the pains and penalties of critical chastisement, with such severity, that verily my bowels of compassion were moved towards those unfortunate objects of his wrath, more especially, as I have some small reasons, which induce me to suspect that they are not altogether so culpable as he may imagine." The letter went on to say of M. T. that "he appeared to be a writer much above mediocrity in talents and information, but, perhaps, below it in taste," and concluded with, "admitting that my opinion of her works was the same as that of M. T., I fear that I should have retained so much of the spirit *d'un preux chevalier*, as to sacrifice the character of a critic to the feelings of a gentleman."

Another friend of Miss Owenson's, less courteous to her antagonist, adroitly quoted, at his expense, some pertinent remarks of old Chaucer.

"Ne ever Knight so bold, ne ever Dame
So chast and loyall lived, but he would strive,
With forged cause, them falsely to defame:
Ne ever thing so well was doen alive
But he with blame would blot, and of due praise deprive."

M. T. at last broke that silence which had seemed

Digitized by Google

so conclusively expressive of the exhausted condition of his quiver of points. The journal in question, we should have said, was a daily publication, and when, day after day, M. T. appeared not, it may well be supposed that the friends of Miss Owenson interchanged numerous significant nods at his expense. "After the lapse of some time," he observes, on February 2nd, "I now come forward with the continuation of my remarks upon Miss Owenson's "Wild Irish Girl," and with my critical appetite not a little sharpened by the acrimonious strictures which some of the lady's friends have bestowed upon me with such profuse liberality. They invoked the Muses to aid their cause, and an auxiliary hobbled into print with its property of lame rhymes and defensive dulness." The reader, in sparing us the labour of transcribing more, will spare himself the drudgery of wading through a painfully malignant and verbose diatribe. M. T. had neither pith nor point, but rioted in an abundance of sweeping assertion unsupported by proof. There are always plenty of ill-natured people who love to see their neighbours vilified; and on the following day we find the letter of M. T. reprinted in the "Freeman" for their gratification, or behoof. A few stings were added by way of postscript, and the reader is informed that "the immortal Ossian is satisfactorily proved by Miss Owenson to have been of real unadultered Hibernian lineage, and a personage who was as little acquainted with Scotland as Macpherson was with truth." This fact has been since established.

On February 4th, 1807, another champion on Miss Owenson's side sprang into the arena and grappled with M. T., of whom he said that however deficient in other critical requisites, he possessed at least the acidity of a critic. The writer dated his able letter

Digitized by Google

from "Lisburn," and was probably one of the Crossleys of Lisburn, with whom Miss Owenson was so intimate. Speaking of "The Wild Irish Girl," the writer said: "It displays so much knowledge of the literature and antiquities of her native country that it astonishes us while we read. By her glowing pencil our national character is drawn and displayed in its proper light. To wrest her native country from the opprobrium which has been laid on it by illiberality and prejudice seems to have been the task this young Patriot alloted to herself, which as far as could be accomplished by genius she has performed. The performance adds another wreath to her laurels, and entitles her to the gratitude of her country. This, Sir, is my dispassionate and unbiassed opinion of the works of Miss Owenson. Her genius and taste I admire; I consider her as one of the brightest ornaments of our Isle, and one from whose future works (when a few years have given maturity to her judgment) much may be expected. M. T. may continue his strictures with the additional acidity he threatens. The discerning no doubt will see that he is either blinded by prejudice, or writes from a worse motive; and the most heedless may see that in the very beginning of his criticism, he perverts the sense and brings forth meanings which Miss Owenson could never have thought of, much less invented: this, when he is so disposed he may do with any other work from the highest production of human intellect down to the lowest. Miss Owenson need not expect to escape censure. It has ever been an attendant on genius. It is a tax paid to the public for being eminent."

This was followed by "a Familiar Epistle to Miss Owenson from an old friend with a new face." The

Digitized by Google

letter was a long one, but the motive rather than the matter deserves respectful recognition.

> "Lady, what wonders in your works we view
> All wit ere fancied, or all learning knew,
> Dress, love, and morals grace thy glowing page,
> At once instruct and ornament the age."

She is further assured that "in books or diamonds equally you shine," and that though, "great in the drama," she was greater in the Court.

> "What carping critics then shall dare to say
> Your works are follies fleeting as the day—
> Ephemeral beauties—or inconstant sense,
> Vain without learning, without wit pretence;
> Thy prose bombastic, and thy verses lame,
> The one high sounding, and the other tame."

Refering to M. T. the writer said :—

> "Could he have cavill'd, if he first perus'd
> Or scann'd those morals none but him accused."

Although "The Wild Irish Girl" was attacked on the ostensible pretext of its errors of style and taste, Miss Owenson and her friends well knew that political enmity and alarm were really the main springs which opened the flood gates of critical invective upon her. The true motive for this savage onslaught was not avowed, but every body of ordinary penetration saw it. The liberal sentiments expressed in "The Wild Irish Girl" filled the Orange Ascendancy party with alarm and revenge.

The malignant and mysterious critic who had rushed into the field, determined to snuff out the light of Miss Owenson's fame, genius and patriotism, found himself, at last, completely foiled in his object. The dagger which he aimed at Miss Owenson's reputation was driven back, by superior strength,

Digitized by Google

upon his own. The peculiar force and virulence of his style was, as the reader has seen, speedily recognised; and, gathering up his various missiles of destruction, we find him retreating, crest-fallen but prudentially, from the arena. For six weeks subsequently we obtain no glimpse of M. T. in the daily columns of the "Freeman's Journal."

We trust that in reproducing so many extracts from this long forgotten controversy, we have not taxed the patience of any reader. In writing the history of Lady Morgan's struggles with critics, and achievements in spite of them, it became our duty to advert, at some length, to this, the first and most wily attempt to extinguish her for ever. Considerable delay attended our efforts to discover the documents in question; a peculiar interest, beyond doubt, attaches to them, and the extracts are now transcribed for the first time.

By way of postscript it may, perhaps, be remarked as a singular fact, that there hardly ever yet appeared a novelist, no matter how austerely moral in his aim, who had not to bear critical taunts on the score of immorality. Even Sir Walter Scott was not exempt. An anonymous work published by Hatchard in 1820, labours to prove that the "author of the Waverley Fictions has not made the interests of religion and morality any part of his plan in the numerous volumes he has given to the world."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

Miss Owenson patronised in high quarters.—Public demonstration in her honour.—Becomes a Dramatist.—The Prologue.—M. T. again.—Beats a Retreat.—"Mr. Owenson's Night."—Curran, Grattan, Bushe, Plunket.—Great success of "The Wild Irish Girl."—Patriotic Sketches.—The authoress in Connaught.—Thady Connellan.—The Lay of an Irish Harp.—Miss Owenson appeals on behalf of the Poor.—"Sweep—Sweep."—"Ida of Athens."—Miss Owenson sets aside the Decision of a Judge and Jury.—Stanmore Priory.—The Missionary.—Marriage of Sydney Owenson.—A Romance of Real Life.—Sir Charles Morgan.—Death of Robert Owenson.—Sir Arthur Clarke.—"O'Donnel."—Correspondence with Monk Mason.

GREAT as was Sydney Owenson's triumph at the retreat of her assailant, it had yet to reach its fullness. The short-lived but memorable government of the Duke of Bedford then held sway in Dublin Castle. His arrival had rekindled that hope in the hearts of the Irish Catholics, which had been so long delayed and so often crushed out. The good Viceroy and his Duchess heard of the unworthy attempt to write down Miss Owenson, and in conjunction with the liberal Lord Chancellor Ponsonby, and the humane Commander of the Forces, Lord Harrington, they resolved to sustain her by a public mark of patronage and regard. The Countess of Harrington and Lady Asgill had previously shewn Miss Owenson much courtesy and attention, but a more demonstrative

Digitized by Google

proof of their friendly feeling was now determined upon. Nearly half a century afterwards, Lady Morgan, in recurring to this period of her life, wrote: "The anonymous attacks levied during many months, against 'The Wild Irish Girl' in the Irish journals, led at last to a public testimony in the author's behalf, on the part of these her *first* and *best friends*; and an impromptu little drama styled 'The First Attempt,' (as it was her *last* in that line,) was written and produced at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, at the express wish of her kind supporters, who, one and all, from the representative of majesty downward, attended the first representation, to evince to an anti-Irish faction, their determined protection of Irish talent, however moderate."

When we consider Robert Owenson's theatrical passion and antecedents, it is almost surprising that she who possessed so much hereditary taste and talent, had not before tried her hand at a play. In the "Dublin Evening Post" of February 28th, 1807, we read—"Miss Owenson's opera is in a forward state of rehearsal and will shortly appear before the public. Mr. T. Cooke, who has on so many former occasions contributed to the public entertainment, has harmonised the music of our fair countrywoman." The editor of the "Freeman," observing that the general feeling was in her favour, now espoused the cause of Miss Owenson with considerable devotion. On March 11th, 1807, he announces to the public that Miss Owenson has paid £85 for the expense of hiring the theatre, with the sum of thirty guineas to Mr. Cooke for the musical composition, and adds, "It requires, therefore, all the support and countenance of her friends and the public, not to let her be a sufferer for contributing to our dramatic amusement."

Lady Morgan, more than forty years after, de-

Digitized by Google

scribed incidentally the appearance of old Crow Street Theatre upon this memorable evening. "The theatre exhibited a singular and brilliant spectacle on this occasion, extremely demonstrative of the party feeling at that time in Ireland, and indeed of its peculiar social state. The vice-regal box and dress-circle were exclusively occupied by the Court, and officers of the garrison, who were headed by the Commander-in-Chief. The whole of the liberal part of the Irish bar, and their friends, filled the upper circle, and the pit and galleries were occupied by a popular Irish Catholic audience, whose fun and humorous sallies filled up the intervals of the acts, while their frequent cheers for the Lord-Lieutenant, and frequent calls for 'Patrick's Day,' and for 'Kate Kearney,'—(a popular composition of the author's), produced a sort of *national drama* '*avant la scène,*' infinitely more amusing than that which was enacted on it. The Duchess of Bedford and all the ladies of her circle wore the Irish bodkin, and thus raised the price of Irish gold in the Dublin market of bijouterie! if not of its native talent."

The late Joseph Atkinson, Esq., of Melfield, Treasurer to the Irish Ordnance, a man of amiable disposition, refined taste, and a poet of no mean calibre, (see p. 114 *ante*), stuck to little Sydney like a true friend on this occasion. He wrote the Prologue to her play, and giving her the benefit of his local influence and popularity, published it, with his name, in the journals of the day.

"This night a Novice, to the stage unknown,
To all the failings of an author prone,
Comes here a Penitent to make confession,
Hoping you'll pardon this her first transgression;
If to amuse you should be deemed a crime,
Forgive her motive, and she'll mend in time:
Perhaps ere now the busy voice of fame

Digitized by Google

Has whispered eagerly the author's name
Hints that her laurels have adorn'd Romance,
'Twined with the Shamrock and the flowers of France;
That an old favourite of the Thespian art,
Appears this night to take a daughter's part,
That all her powers of filial love engage
To prove the comfort of a Father's age;
Hearts form'd as yours can such endearments boast,
And those who feel them can applaud them most."

Mr. Atkinson then appeals to public favor for "a female bard."

"Amongst you born 'tis yours to muse and raise
These brilliant talents which enhance your praise,
To you she gives this tribute of her muse
Though vainly tempted Briton's stage to choose,
By Erin's harp which love and fancy strung
She bade her verse be tun'd and numbers sung.
Thus the musician, and the bard inspire,
To rouse your powers, and fan your native fire,
As the Wild Irish Girl her spirit tries,
To bid your ancient fame and genius rise,
To guard with patriot zeal your sainted isle,
Where love and beauty round the graces smile,
And prove, though prejudice abroad may roam,
We seldom find the worth we leave at home.
She to your candour then submits her cause
So judge with mercy—not dramatic laws;
What piece is perfect? None from faults exempt,
Then pray encourage this, her 'First Attempt.'
Her next endeavour more renown may sue—
Prove more deserving of yourself and you.
Snakes in the grass may hiss, and critics hector,
But she's a woman and you'll all protect her!"

The story of the "First Attempt, or the Whim of the Moment," is Spanish, and the scene is laid on the coast of Biscay, near an ancient castle, occupied by the Marquis de las Cisternes, and a fair girl named Elvira, who, when an infant, had been found on the adjacent rocks. The marquis becomes so enthusiastically fond of her, that he treats his own daughter, Nicholetta, with extreme coldness, and she

Digitized by Google

leaves her home. Two young students, Alonzo and Orlando, have retired to the mountainous recesses of the Sierra Morena, to await the consequences of a duel. Alonzo arrives at the conclusion that Elvira must be his sister, who had been lost by shipwreck upon that coast. The students are informed, through the garrulity of Pedro, a servant to the grandee, that two professors are expected at the castle, for the purpose of instructing Elvira in some suitable accomplishments. This offers a good opportunity for gaining admittance, and Orlando and his servant, O'Driscoll (Owenson), a facetious Irishman, assume collegiate gowns, and are introduced to the marquis, who, after a time, suspects how the land lies, and turns them out in disgrace. Orlando returns by means of a trap-door, and after a variety of amusing incidents, Elvira escapes, and marries her deliverer. Alonzo, in the meantime, has been making furious love to Nicholetta, who marries him, and O'Driscoll, not wishing to be idle, takes to wife a certain Miss Flora, who acts a very confidential part as maid to Elvira. The piece opens with a chorus of fishermen rowing in boats towards the shore, which, the theatrical critics of the day tell us, had a highly picturesque effect.

"The Dublin Evening Post" of Thursday, March 6th, records:—"Last night Miss Owenson's opera was performed for the first time to a most brilliant and crowded audience, and received the greatest applause. Mr. Owenson made his first appearance these nine years, and met with a most flattering reception." "The performers exerted themselves with becoming spirit," says the 'Freeman's Journal;' "Richard Jones in particular bustled through his part, and gave a mock Bravura with a portion of comicality which we did not expect. Mr. Owenson sustained

Digitized by Google

the Irish character with his wonted success. He was received with great applause, and the peculiarity of the part which he filled secured him throughout the sympathy of the audience. The opera was received with repeated plaudits, and being announced by Mr. Owenson for a second representation, was welcomed without a dissentient voice." 'The Correspondent' said:—"It is no small compliment to the talents of our countrywoman, Miss Owenson, and to the general estimation in which she is held, that so distinguished a mark of favour should have been bestowed on her, as the personal attention of the Viceroy at the Theatre, and the flattering encouragement which his Excellency has given to the native talent of this kingdom is no less honourable in so distinguished a personage."

In the midst of this general congratulation and jubilee, who should rush into the columns of the "Freeman's Journal" but Miss Owenson's old foe, M. T. He was amazed to see the representative of royalty take by the hand that little girl whom he had sought to proscribe as a traitor to the king, a foe to God, and a Latitudinarian in morals. The views of the flippant critic seem to have undergone some modification from this moment. He went to the theatre to sneer, and he remained to stare. He was pleased with Miss Owenson's dramatic attempt. But let him speak for himself:—"In this instance I feel inclined to bestow more of praise than censure. Whether my placidness of disposition was occasioned by the harmonic influence of Mr. Cooke's excellent overture, the suddenness of the incidents, or the lively dialogues of the drama, I cannot now determine; but this I must own, that the combination produced an extremely pleasing entertainment." M. T. then proceeds, somewhat inconsistently, to criticize

Digitized by Google

with a spice of the old leven. "The plot," we are told, "is not remarkable for either novelty, or interest. Mr. Owenson sang a very good song, but said a great deal which if not said, would have been better for the drama and the authoress." M. T. concludes, "It may damp the pleasure which Miss Owenson's friends would otherwise derive from my approbation, to hear, that 'The Wild Irish Girl' is not forgotten. Some circumstances have hitherto prevented a continuation of my former critical observations upon that subject, which will be immediately resumed."

They were not resumed, however, and the file of the "Freeman" for 1807, may be vainly searched for any further lucubrations of his pen. The concluding flourish was merely a piece of well known newspaper tactics, resorted to at a moment of difficulty, and when it is desirable to conceal the humiliation of a prudential retreat. M. T. raised a cloud of dust, which served at once to blind the eyes of his readers, and to enable him to escape behind it.

"The First Attempt" had a run of several nights, and a benefit was awarded to the authoress, which as Mr. Donaldson assures us, cleared four hundred pounds. The author of "Fifty Years of an Actor's Life," adds:—"The characters were sustained by Richard Jones, J. Phillips, Fullam, H. Weston, Mrs. Stewart, and Mrs. T. Cooke, (late Miss Horsley). It was in this piece that the popular ballad of 'Kate Kearney' was originally sung." After each representation of "The First Attempt," Owenson appeared in some comic afterpiece, such as, "The favourite Farce of the Register Office, or the Humours of Paddy O'Carroll, with a variety of Comic Songs by Mr. Owenson."

On the 27th of May, 1807, he took a benefit, which helped to sustain for a little time longer the

Digitized by Google

sinking fortunes of his counting house in Fleet Street. We quote from the theatric announcement of the day:

"Mr. Owenson's night. On this evening, the 27th of May, 1807, will be presented a prelude, called, 'The Irish Actor, or, the Recruiting Manager.' Phelim O'Guffinocarrollocarneymacfrane, (the Irish Actor) Mr. Owenson; in which character he will sing first, a new characteristic song, written for the occasion, called, 'An Irishman all the World Over.' And 'Drimunduh, or, the Poor Irishman's Lamentation for the Loss of his Cow.' To conclude with a 'Comic Occasional Address,' in the character of the Irish Actor, by Mr. Owenson; after which will be performed a comedy, called the 'West Indian.' To which will be added, the admired opera of 'The First Attempt.' Tickets to be had of Mr. Owenson, 15, Trinity Street."

Among those with whom Miss Owenson, at this period, associated in the fashionable Whig circles of Dublin, were Curran, Grattan, Bushe, Plunket, the Tighes, Sir John Stevenson, and the Cramptons. Curran, Plunket, and Bushe, had just taken office, the first as Master of the Rolls, and the two latter as Attorney and Solicitor General under the Liberal administration of Lord Grenville. Lady Morgan, in adverting to this early period of her life, half a century afterwards, observed that "there was scarcely one of these truly illustrious names, (the illustration of Nature's highest letter patent of nobility,) who were not *suspected* of being *suspicious* adherents of the high-treason of anti-coercion. The wittiest man of his time, Charles Bushe, afterwards Chief-Justice of Ireland, and the member of a family whose talent was characterized as the Irish *Esprit de Mortemart*,

Digitized by Google

was accused of being a *United Irishman;* Curran was deemed something worse! The "*Tighes of Woodstock,*" were stigmatized as *the most unchangeful of Irish Whigs,* and at that moment further illustrated by the genius and charms of the first and finest *poetess* of her own or perhaps any country, the author of "Psyche." As to the Plunkett—"The blood of Douglas will protect itself." Sheil was then only breaking the shell of his future outburst of genius and patriotism: and North, who bore the sobriquet of the "Star of the West," then best known in the historical debating society of Dublin by his classical ovations, was foully suspected of being Irish likewise! under which odium he entered the House of Commons shortly after. Sir John Stevenson was the first and best of Irish composers since the days of Carolan, and the founder of a school of singing quite original, and best illustrated in the musical recitations of Mr. Moore; the musical talents of his two accomplished and beautiful daughters, the late Marchioness of Headfort, and Mrs. Lambert of Beau Park, still remembered with admiration in high circles of English taste and fashion; and the *rare gift* of social agreeability of the Crampton family is STILL brilliantly illustrated in the person of the most eminent of its members, Sir Philip Crampton, Bart., the surgeon-general. Last and least of the "mere Irishry" drawn within the English pale of this truly delightful society, was an obscure girl, whose sole passport into circles so brilliant was that she had written an Irish tale, in the Irish interest! sung Irish songs, translated by herself from Irish poems, and played the *Irish* harp, —"*et Dieu sait la raclairie que c'etait.*"

"It would be want of pride and gratitude," said Lady Morgan on another occasion, "not to boast of

Digitized by Google

the advantages I derived from the attentions and hospitality of the distinguished families of Charlemont, Leitrim, Charleville, Cloncurry, and Tighe, on my first *entrée* upon life and literature."

The fair authoress, in 1807, favoured the public with a detail of the more exalted circumstances and motives which led to the origin of "The Wild Irish Girl." "I came," she goes on to say, "to the self-devoted task, with a diffidence proportioned to the ardour which instigated me to the attempt; for as a *woman*, a *young woman*, and an *Irishwoman*, I felt all the delicacy of undertaking a work which had for the professed theme of its discussion, circumstances of national import, and national interest. But though I meant not to appear on the list of opposition as a fairy amazon, armed with a pebble and a sling against a host of gigantic prejudices; although to compose a national defence, to ward the shaft of opprobrium hurled at the character of my country, to extenuate the effects or expose the causes of its popular discontents, was as incompatible with my sex and years, as with my trivial talent and limited powers; yet I was still aware that in the historic page, recent details, and existing circumstances of Irish story, lived many a record of Irish virtue, Irish genius, and Irish heroism, while the simplicity of truth alone was sufficient to delineate many a tale of pathos which woman's heart could warmest feel, and truest tell, and many a trait of romantic colouring and chivalrous refinement, which woman's fancy fondest contemplates and best depicts.

"To blend the imaginary though probable incident with the interesting fact, to authenticate the questioned refinement of ancient habits, by the testimony of living modes, faithfully to delineate what I had intimately observed, and to found my opinions on

Digitized by Google

that medium which ever vibrates between the partial delineation of national prejudice, on one side, and the exaggerated details of foreign antipathy on the other; such was the prospectus my wishes dared to draw. If I failed in their accomplishment, that failure arose from the mediocrity of very limited talents, which I soon found were inadequate to realize all my heart dictated, or my hopes conceived. The world, however, had the indulgence to tolerate the execution in favour of the motive, and the reception with which it honoured 'The Wild Irish Girl,' was such as surpassed my most sanguine expectations, and stimulated me to further exertion in that cause, which it is impossible to examine without interest, or to embrace without enthusiasm. Politics can never be a woman's science; but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment. It is inseparably connected with all those ties of tenderness which her heart is calculated to cherish, and though the energy of the citizen may not animate her feelings to acts of national heroism, the fondness of the child, the mistress, the wife and the mother, must warm and ennoble them into sentiments of national affection. For myself, while my heart still triumphs in the principle which leads me to effuse over the world's ear the 'native wood-notes wild' of my native country, I would wish it to be believed that I have ever swept the strings of the Irish Harp, with the tremulous touch of conscious inability; that in humbly endeavouring to revive the faded shamrock, that which droops round my country's emblem, I have ever brought to the grateful effort, an anxious hope, rather than a sanguine expectation of success; and that in touching on the grievances of the lower orders of my countrymen, and their fatal but consequent effects, unswayed by interest, unbiassed by partiality, the hope of wooing the

Digitized by Google

attention of abler minds to a subject on which my own has long dwelt with ineffectual anxiety, and unavailing regret, has been the sole motive of the feeble efforts, I now humbly submit to the world's consideration."

The success of "The Wild Irish Girl" was almost unprecedented. In less than two years it ran through seven editions in Great Britain, and its permanence of popularity was doubly attested a few years ago, by Mr. Colburn reprinting it among his Standard Novels, and Mr. Bryce republishing it in a cheap form for Railway reading.

That nothing else was spoken of in the fashionable circles of Dublin half a century ago, is evident from the numerous advertisements of "The Glorvina Mantle," and "Glorvina Ornament," with which the local journals abound. "Hearing that an attempt has been made," observes one of them, "to imitate the Glorvina Ornament, honoured by the patronage of her Grace the Duchess of Bedford, and which Brush and Son have her Grace's permission to announce, they beg to request the various assortments, with which they are now constantly supplied, may be viewed previous to the adoption of any other; when the native correctness of that Ornament will best evince to the eye of taste and judgment its superiority."

If "The Wild Irish Girl" had many beauties, it had also some faults. Sir Jonah Barrington thus blows hot and cold upon it: "Though a fiction not free from some inaccuracies, much inappropriate dialogue, and forced incident, it is impossible to peruse 'The Wild Irish Girl' of Lady Morgan, without deep interest, or to dispute its claims as a production of true national feeling as well as literary talent. That tale is perhaps the best of all her

Digitized by Google

novel writings. Compared with others, it strikingly exhibits the author's falling off from the simple touches of unsophisticated nature to the less refined conceptions of what she herself styles 'fashionable society.'"

"The Wild Irish Girl" contained many portraits, drawn upon the spot from real life. Amongst others, was Denis Hampson, the Blind Bard of Macgilligan, who died shortly after at the age of one hundred and ten. His death is recorded in the "Gentleman's Magazine," vol. lxxvii., p. 1232.

The patronage bestowed by the Duke and Duchess of Bedford on Sydney Owenson was brought to an abrupt termination, on April the 19th, 1807, by the downfall of the Portland administration, and the removal of their Excellencies from Ireland. By the Irish Liberal Politicians of that day, this administrative change was deeply deplored. The Government fell from no other reason than its refusal to abandon the Catholic cause. Miss Owenson, as events afterwards turned out, saw no reason to continue that feeling of regret, with which she had been filled by the departure of her noble, kind, and influential patrons. The Duke of Bedford was succeeded by the convivial Charles, Duke of Richmond, who not only showed Sydney Owenson every ordinary mark of courtesy and patronage, but went so far as to knight her husband and brother-in-law.

Soon after the publication of "The Wild Irish Girl," Miss Owenson made a short tour in England, where the terms of reproach and contempt in which her country was generally spoken of, induced the spirited young Irishwoman to devote her best energies to the compilation of such a mass of evidence as could not fail to arrest attention and have a forcible tendency in producing opposite impressions.

Digitized by Google

In 1807, appeared two volumes of "Patriotic Sketches, written in Connaught by Miss Owenson." Let us trace her movements from this book.

"I left Dublin in the autumn of 1806," she tells us, "with the intention of rambling through such scenes in the north-west of Connaught as I had not yet visited; and it was here my little journey began to receive its first decided character of interest; it was here that the impression made on my imagination insensibly communicated to memory the first of those rough sketches which, divested of the delicate pencil, touch the *pentimenti* (to use a technical phrase) of studied art and practised judgment. I have copied with the same rude simplicity with which they were drawn in the moment of passing observation, as the heart was touched by objects of moral interest, or the fancy awakened by scenes of natural beauty. I had watched the last beam of the setting sun stealing his faded splendours from the last of those lakes which precede the entrance of the cavern-path, and the broken and irregular masses of rock which arose pyramidically on either side, partially caught the retreating glow of the horizon, and displayed the greatest variety of light and shadow, till gradually opening, a rich and expansive prospect broke on the eye; the lakes and fairy land of Hazle-wood, the bold attitude of Benbubin, the beetling brow of Knock-na-bee, the ocean's gleaming line, commingling with the horizon, and the town of Sligo spreading irregularly along the base of a lofty hill, crowned with meadows, and successively betrayed by the expanding view; till the softening influence of twilight mellowed every outline into air, and dissolved every object into one mild and indistinct hue."

Many additional pages are devoted to Sligo and

Digitized by Google

its grey old Abbey. That tendency to regard, ever after, with an undue importance, localities first known, and revered in childhood, is traceable in Miss Owenson's remarks. It is absurd to compare Sligo in any one particular to Babylon or Thebes; and yet the first chapter of her "Patriotic Sketches" contains such comparisons. Notwithstanding this puerility, however, there are many remarkably sound political suggestions, and numberless truly beautiful pictures of local scenery in the book—marred here and there perhaps by a few tinges of sectarian prejudice, which Sydney had imbibed from the essentially puritanic atmosphere with which her infancy was surrounded. The generous motive, however, which led Miss Owenson to undertake this work, arrests attention in every chapter and demands respectful acknowledgment. By such passages as the following, which are selected from many others of a similar tone and aim, Miss Owenson enlisted a wide spread feeling of sympathy on behalf of her destitute and degraded fellow-countrymen.

"When the strained eye of sorrowing affection has followed the father and the husband, even till fancy gives what distance snatches from its view, the mother closes the door of her desolate cabin; and when (as is generally the case) her family are too helpless to relinquish her maternal cares and enable her to work, followed by her little children, and frequently by an aged parent, beggary is embraced as the only alternative to want and famine. Sometimes with an infant on her back, and another in her arms, (while the ablest of her little train is always charged with the tin vessel which carries the sour milk supplied by charity, and another infant wanderer sustains the weight of the blanket which constitutes the only covering thrown over them at night), she commences

Digitized by Google

her sad and solitary wanderings. How frequently, and in what opposite seasons, have I beheld these helpless and wretched groups straggling along the high roads, or reposing their wearied limbs beneath the shelter of a ditch! I have seen the feet of the heavily-laden mother totter through winter snows beneath her tender burthen: while the frost bitten limbs of her infant companions drew tears to their eyes, which in the happy thoughtlessness of childhood had never been shed to the unconscious misery of their situation, had not bodily pain taught them to flow. I have met them wandering over those heaths, which afforded no shelter to their aching brows, amidst the meridian ardours of a summer's day; when violent heat and insupportable fatigue, rendered the stream they stopped to drink a luxury the most exquisite. I have met them at the door of magisterial power, and seen them spurned from its threshold by him who should have redressed their grievances or relieved their wants; and I have seen them cheerfully received into the cabin of an equally humble, but more fortunate compatriot, where their wants were a recommendation to benevolence, and their number no check to its exertion. For never yet was the door of an Irish cabin closed against the suppliant who appealed to the humanity of its owner."

The authoress did not trust to mere hearsay for her impressions. She conversed personally with the peasantry, and committed verbatim to her tablets, an interesting selection from the dialogues which took place between them on these occasions. The plan of the work is original, and contains much novel interest. Sparkles of diamond wit, gushes of unctuous humour, and soarings of high poetic thought, are made to relieve, artistically and alternately, various harrowing details of grim reality. The

Digitized by Google

whole bears evidence of considerable erudition and reading. It is somewhat surprising how Miss Owenson could have acquired so intimate a familiarity with such miscellaneous literature as Giraldus Cambrensis, Verulam, Ware, Harris, Burke, Valancey, Voltaire, Allemande, Stainhurst, Helvetius, Montesquieu, Coke, Johnson, Chandler, Walker, Davis and Young. And yet, every second page contains references to the writings of these authors. Of foot notes we have what many readers would be inclined to regard as more than enough. Every "Sketch" abounds with them; and it would seem that the fair author had yet to learn that such illustrations, except when unavoidable, completely break the flowing beauty, and encumber the sense of literary composition. The reader, in the midst of the most beautiful details, is suddenly hurled to the bottom of the page by a falling star. The matter thus unartistically obtruded might easily have been embodied, with good effect, in the text. The eye compelled perpetually to desert the page for an extraneous foot-note, and then to rise again unrefreshed, becomes after a while fatigued; but these and other imperfections to which we have alluded, were all corrected by Lady Morgan, when experience and reading had matured her judgment.

These pages have been written to little purpose, however, if the reader has failed to see that, even at the present early epoch of her life, Sydney Owenson possessed considerable intellectual power. Among other qualities rarely enjoyed by the softer sex, she exercised a singular facility in analytically drawing from present political premises, strikingly accurate political conclusions. Tithes, which more than twenty years afterwards excited so powerful a sensation as the monster grievance of Ireland, received

Digitized by Google

their first blow in this unpretending volume of Miss Owenson's. The views expressed, and the language which clothes them, are sound, eloquent, and vigorous. In her Ninth Sketch, Miss Owenson, "with a lady's hand but a lion's heart," probes to the bottom, like an experienced surgeon, the festering germ of disturbance which then agitated Connaught, under the auspices of "the Thrashers." Suffice it to say that they sprang from the same cause which nearly thirty years after ensanguined the plains of Gortroe; Carrickshock, Dunmanway Castlepollard, and Newtownbarry. But as this subject has been since tolerably well exhausted, and is not, in truth, a very inviting one, we prefer to follow Sydney Owenson on some of her Connaught excursions in search of the picturesque.

The Eleventh Sketch opens with an account of the traditions of Tyreragh and Tyrawley, and an eloquent allusion to her friend, and as she would always have it, her kinsman Sir Malby Crofton. "My heart had long owed a pilgrimage to this remote and little known barony," she writes, "for it was the residence of the dear and respected friend for whom that heart had long throbbed with an invariable pulse of gratitude, tenderness and affection." Further on she adds:—"L—— house, the ancient family-seat of Sir M—— C——, Bart., was the goal of my little journey, and I reached its venerable avenue at a season of the day peculiarly favourable to the soft *chiaro-oscuro* of picturesque beauty: with the old gloomy avenue of an ancient mansion-seat, there is, I think, invariably connected a certain sentiment which bears the heart back to 'other times,' and awakens it to an emotion of tender reverence, and melancholy pleasure. For myself, I have never walked beneath its interwoven branches uninfluenced

Digitized by Google

by a certain feeling, in which memory's pensive spell mingled with the speculations of awakened fancy."

We are informed by the present Sir Malby Crofton Bart.* that a large portion of "The Wild Irish Girl" and the entire of "The Patriotic Sketches," were composed at Longford House, the family seat of his ancestors. Miss Owenson thus describes this now historic spot. "The lands and demesne of L—lie almost along the shores of the Atlantic ocean, and immediately beneath the shelter of Knockachree, from whose rugged base swells the lesser chain of the Ox mountains, whose sides were once covered with luxuriant woods, and from whose towering summit rush innumerable torrents, which lessening into streams in their deep descent, water the plains beneath, and flow into the ocean. The shores on the other side of the bay are romantic and striking; the beautiful peninsula of Tandsago, intervenes its cultivated landscapes, and most happily breaks the view, while the rude dashing of the waves against the bar, lends an effective sound; and the back scenery afforded by the mountains, wears a character of wildness and sublimity."

Miss Owenson's tastes and tendencies were singularly and essentially Celtic. She regretted, among other refined national grievances, that the harpers, the original composers and depositories of the music of Ireland, should have ceased to be cherished and retained by its nobility and gentry. She sorrowed to see that the warm ardent spirit of national enthu-

* Letter from Sir M. Crofton Bart. November 26th, 1859. Sir Malby adds, in reply to a query, that no trace of Miss Owenson's correspondence with his grandfather exist, owing to a great fire which totally destroyed Longford House many years ago. Sir Malby is not aware of any relationship between his family and the Owensons.

Digitized by Google

siasm, which had hung delighted on the song of national melody, to which many an associated idea, many an endeared feeling, lent their superadded charm, should have faded into apathy, and that neither the native strain, nor the native sentiment which gave it soul, touched any longer on the spring of national sensibility, or awakened the dormant energy of national taste.

The second volume of "The Patriotic Sketches" concludes with an amusing description of Thaddeus Connellan, who as "the Apostle of Lower Connaught," and an Irish translator of some ability, acquired notoriety at a later period. "My rambles and frequent conversations with the peasantry in the neighbourhood of L— House," writes Miss Owenson, "have obtained me a degree of rustic notoriety to which I stand indebted for a visit from Mr. Thady O'Connellan, a school-master, highly esteemed and looked up to by his rural disciples." Mr. Connellan introduced himself to Miss Owenson by saying that having heard she was fond of Irish composition, he wished to submit some of the Poems of Ossian which were much at her service. "The Irish," he added, "is the finest tongue in the world, the English can never come near it, and the Greek alone is worthy of being compared to it." He then with great enthusiasm, repeated the description of Fion's Shield in Irish, and Homer's description of the Œgis of Achilles giving the preference to the former; and Ossian's account of his father's hounds, was, he contended, superior to the dogs of Ovid. Connellan declared his intention of translating the Eneid and Terence into Irish. "When I complimented him on the extent of his erudition," writes Miss Owenson, "and expressed my astonishment at his having acquired it in so remote a situation, he replied:

Digitized by Google

'Young lady, I went far and near for it, as many a poor scholar did before me: for I could construe Homer before I ever put on shoe or stocking, aye, or a hat either.' When he was a young man (he said) there were but few schools in Connaught, and those few but bad: and it was not unusual for eight or ten boys 'who had the love of learning strong upon them,' to set off bare-footed and bare-headed to Munster, where the best schools were then held; that they commenced their philosophic pilgrimage poor and friendless: but they begged their way, and that the name of *poor scholar* procured them every where friends and subsistence; that having heard much of the celebrity of a school-master in the county of Clare, he and his adventurous companions directed their steps towards his seminary; 'but,' added Thady 'it being a grazing country, and of course no hospitality to be found there (meaning that it was thinly inhabited), we could not get a spot to shelter our heads in the neighbourhood of the school, so being a tight set of Connaught boys, able and strong, we carried off the school-master one fine night, and never stopped till we landed him on the other side of the Shannon, when a priest gave us a house, and so we got learning and hospitality to boot, and the school-master made a great fortune in time, all Connaught flocking to him, and now here I am at the head of a fine Seminary myself.'" The Lyceum of this Sage was a miserable cabin on the side of a desolate road. In this hovel he taught Homer and Virgil to a select portion of his bare-footed pupils, and a solid course of instruction to all. Miss Owenson's object in devoting an entire chapter to this subject, was no doubt to shew the passionate love of letters, which has always characterised the native Irish.

Digitized by Google

Miss Owenson mentions in this work, that she received much kind and hospitable attention from the family of Mr. O——of C—— House. The party to whom she alludes was, we understand, the late Mr. Ormsby of Commin House near Sligo.

From the hour that little Sydney received the gracious attention of their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, she rose like a rocket in general estimation. By the fashionable world, her society was courted with avidity; by the populous, whose cause she had so warmly espoused, she was idolized. The "Freeman's Journal" which had originally been somewhat prejudiced against her, observes, on November 6th, 1807: "It may justly be said that this young lady is one of the greatest ornaments our country could ever boast of. She moves in the very highest circles, courted and admired, as well for her unrivalled talents, as her elegant and unaffected manners. She is realizing, we hear, a noble independence, by the exertion of her own cultivated and highly expanded mind, while places and pensions are bestowed on 'foul-mouthed railors'—enemies to the peace, the genius, and the virtues of our country."

"Patriotic Sketches of Ireland," was followed by the "Lay of an Irish Harp, or Metrical Fragments," which contained many beautiful flashes of poetic thought and imagery. It was, we believe, in this book that the following lines occurred which furnish some insight into the idiosyncracies of the fair writer.

> Too ardent to be constant long,
> If love's wild rose I haply gathered,
> I scarcely breathed its fragrant bloom,
> When love's wild rose grew pale and withered.

Miss Owenson's labours at this period were not alone varied, but of the most zealous, humane, and

Digitized by Google

ennobling character. She did not selfishly reserve mental exertion for the highly successful and remunerative volumes which yearly fell from her pen; but through the medium of the public press, laboured in the generous cause of philanthropy and patriotism. Although her society was eagerly courted by the first circles in the metropolis, she often left the *salon* or ball-room to perform some office of gracious charity. We now find her contributing letters to the "Freeman's Journal," occasionally. One dated November 22nd, 1807, we subjoin. "This letter," wrote the editor, "regards a subject which is always welcome to an Irish mind. As the reader will perceive, it bears the signature of a lady well known in the literary and fashionable world."

"Sir—While moral suffering is most acutely felt by minds of educated refinement, of native and acquired sensibility, human nature, in every state, in every stage, is alive to the keen pang of physical evil; and while the most perfect corporeal health is frequently found united to the 'mind diseased,' the thrill of pain, which quivers through the suffering body, famishes the mind's repose, and blunts, or destroys its better faculties. In the sad list of ills, which 'flesh is heir to,' there are few more acute than that which severity of weather, 'the jar of elements,' brings with it, to those whom poverty exposes to all the 'penalties of Adam.' If the couch of down, the carpet's velvet, the hearth's genial glow, the window's folded drapery, and all those comforts which luxury devises, and opulence bestows, cannot soften to the startled ear the tempest's blast, the thunder's roll—cannot shield from the delicate frame the sudden chill of piercing frost; if a transient absence from the luxurious drawing-room (tho' but to step to a

Digitized by Google

scarce less luxurious carriage) congeals every limb; what must be their sufferings for whom no ray of hope beams, who, amidst the horrors of shipwreck, meet the most dreadful of deaths; or perishing with cold and want on land, meet a more tedious, and scarce less pitiable destiny.

"Along the snow-deep and half-deserted streets, behold the shivering mother, urged by the keenest necessity a mother's heart can feel, faintly appealing to the charity of the few who pass her, for a trifle to purchase a scanty portion of fuel for the little wretches, who in some loathsome corner pine for her return. Behold the noxious retreat of poverty—the miserable garret—its damp walls—its desolated air—its shattered windows, (but ill fitted to resist the keen blast, or drifting snow) in its remotest part half covered by a tattered blanket; the sickly, decayed tradesman—the tender father vainly endeavours to communicate to his clinging offspring that comfort and that warmth, he has long ceased himself to feel. Glance into the wards of the Debtor's Prison—unbar the door of the untried delinquent's dungeon; even there the horrors of imprisonment are sharpened by the season's severities; these are no fancy pictures in this city—they are, at this moment, too sadly realized. It is unnecessary to say more, for when did misery raise her fainting voice, and find the Irish heart dead to her suppliant accents? As the season seems to set in with a rigour 'not portentous of its end,' some effort of public benevolence might be opposed to the evil of the existing moment, or some plan suggested to obviate the sufferings of a future day. The purchase and distribution of fuel, after the manner adopted in the soup-kitchens some years back, might, perhaps, be found adequate to the removal of the chief distress the poor and indigent

Digitized by Google

are likely to sustain, or some better plan may be suggested by the actively benevolent, more efficacious in its tendency. That 'we always succeed when we wish to do good,' is an axiom advanced by a celebrated French philosopher, and to which every good heart will bring the testimony of its own experience. In the present instance, therefore, while the principle of national benevolence lives so warmly in every Irish heart, the means of its successful execution cannot long remain an object of speculation to Irish minds."

It is impossible to doubt the immense utility of which these appeals of Miss Owenson were productive. The blessings of the poor, with an earnest prayer that heaven might grant a long and happy life to their benefactress, perpetually fell in whispers around her.

Lady Morgan, in a letter to the author of these pages, in 1855, alludes to some appeals on behalf of the little Sweeps in Dublin, which she threw off about the same time. It was not until full thirty years after, that the hapless condition of these unfortunate little creatures, was taken into serious consideration by the Legislature. So far back as 1807, Miss Owenson endeavoured to excite a feeling of sympathy in their behalf by such indirect appeals as the following, which we transcribe from the "Freeman's Journal," of December 8, 1807.

'Twas a keen frosty morn, and the snow heavy falling
When a child of misfortune was thus sadly calling,
"Sweep, sweep—I am cold! and the snow very deep,
O pray take compassion on poor little sweep!
"Sweep, chimney, sweep!"

The tears down his cheeks in fast drops were rolling,
Unnoticed, unpitied, by those by him strolling;
Who frequently warn'd him at a distance to keep
While he cried—"Take compassion on poor little sweep!
"Sweep, chimney, sweep!"

Digitized by Google

In vain he implored passing strangers for pity,
They smil'd at his plaints, and they bantered his ditty :
Humanity's offspring as yet lay asleep,
Nor heard the sad wailings of poor little sweep!
"Sweep, chimney, sweep!"

At the step of a door half froze and dejected,
He sat down and grieved to be shunn'd and neglected;
When a kind hearted damsel by chance saw him weep,
And resolv'd to befriend, yes, the poor little sweep!
"Sweep, chimney, sweep!"

Unmindful of sneers to a neighbour's she led him,
Warm'd his limbs by the fire and tenderly fed him:
And, oh! what delight did this fair maiden reap,
When she found a lost brother in poor little sweep!
"Sweep, chimney, sweep!"

With rapture she gaz'd on each black sooty feature,
And hugged to her bosom the foul smelling creature,
Who sav'd by a sister, no longer need creep,
Through lanes, courts, and alleys, a poor little sweep!
"Sweep, chimney, sweep!"

The avidity with which Miss Owenson's society was now courted and secured, made considerable inroads on that leisure which had previously been employed to such admirable literary effect, and pecuniary advantage. For the next two years no work from her pen appeared. At length in 1809, "Woman, or, Ida of Athens," a romance in four volumes, was published, containing many highly ornate descriptions of scenery, and individual portraitures, with some situations possessing much romantic interest, and picturesque beauty; but occasionally marred by the blemishes of taste which had marked the earlier writings of Miss Owenson. "Ida of Athens" became a temporary favourite, although some of the leading reviews did their best to damn it. The "Quarterly Review," in its first volume, singled it out for a savage onslaught. But this influential

Digitized by Google

antagonism was perhaps an attestation of the importance of the book. Even the lordly Byron condescended to go out of his way for the purpose of reading a lecture to Miss Owenson on the subject of her Athenian heroine. The passage to which we allude may be found in one of the notes to "Childe Harold." "Ida of Athens" attained much ephemeral popularity, but the impression which any reader who now opens it will probably retain is, that Lady Morgan is never so successful as when on Irish ground.

Such was the popularity of Miss Owenson at this period, that the lower orders of her countrymen looked upon her talents as of a very influential kind. "A poor fellow, a letter-carrier," writes one who knew our authoress well, "of good general character, the father of a large family, was induced, in a moment of extreme distress, to open a letter committed to his charge, and to possess himself of a small sum of money, with the intention of restoring it in a few days to the owner. For this offence he was condemned to die. In the court in which he was tried, a scene of the deepest distress was exhibited by the presence and anguish of his aged father, his wife, and her helpless infants: but the crime was one of those which society never pardons. In such cases Cupidity and Apprehension are alike interested in striking terror, and Mercy and Hope must be silent at their bidding. From the gloom of the condemned cell this unfortunate criminal, like the drowning wretch who grasps at a straw, appealed to the imaginary influence of a popular writer, and the claim was irresistible to one whose domestic affections were the mainspring of her being. On the receipt of his letter, Miss Owenson addressed herself to the different barristers of her acquaintance; but

Digitized by Google

the reply she received was uniform. The crime was unpardonable, the man's fate was sealed, and interference could only expose her to mortification and defeat. Unintimidated by these dispiriting reports, she applied directly to Baron Smith, the presiding judge on the trial, who directed her to the foreman of the jury, with the promise, that if a recommendation to mercy could be procured from them, he would, in consequence of the conviction resting on circumstantial evidence, back it with his sanction. Miss Owenson saw the foreman, induced him to assemble the jurymen, and to sign the recommendation. She then drew up a memorial to the Duke of Richmond, the head of the Irish government; and, in one word, procured a commutation of the sentence to perpetual transportation. It is pleasurable to add, that on arriving at New South Wales, the reprieved man became an industrious and honest member of society; and supports his family in independence and comfort. A circumstance not dissimilar in its events, and even more romantic in the details, occured to Jenner, who was the means of saving a youth, condemned to certain death under the horrible form of perpetual slavery. The recollection of such anecdotes is a source of the purest satisfaction. They tend to raise the literary character; they do honour to human nature, and they relieve the dark shade which almost uniformly obscures the political history of the species."

To the famous political and social reunions of the Marquis of Abercorn, at Stanmore Priory, Miss Owenson was now cordially invited. Stanmore, at the period of which we write, was a centre of politics and fashion; and while similar receptions at its great rival, Holland House, wore an exclusively Whig complexion, those at Lord Abercorn's were of a much

Digitized by Google

more mixed and general character. The social intercourse between chiefs of parties which subsisted at Stanmore Priory, contributed much to soften public and political asperities. Some of our author's writings not only received their inspiration at Stanmore, but were absolutely penned in the midst of the exalted circle of guests which the Marquis of Abercorn had gathered around him.

When we remember the savage ferocity with which Miss Owenson's national writings were assailed, from motives of party spite, it is not surprising that the promptings of her sensitive mind, should have led her to discontinue, for a short interval, works of a purely Irish character. In 1811, she presented the public with a three volume novel, called "The Missionary, an Indian Tale." This work was written at Stanmore Priory; and not a few grave statesmen, disenthralled for a few weeks, from the cares and turmoil of office, loungingly abandoned themselves to the luxury of listening to Miss Owenson, as she read aloud her exciting and wildly romantic story. Among those present were Lord Aberdeen, Lord Castlereagh, Lord Ripon (then Mr. Robinson,) Lord Palmerston, the Duke of Devonshire; and on another similar occasion, the Princess of Wales, the Duc de Berri, and the ex-King of Sweden. It is a remarkable fact that Lord Castlereagh, then Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was so fascinated by the author, and her frail "Missionary," that he offered to accompany the young authoress to town, and having sent for Mr. Stockdale of Pall Mall, the work was absolutely disposed of to that publisher for £400, in the study of Lord Castlereagh. The good nature of this distinguished statesman was the more remarkable as Lady Morgan had repeatedly, and forcibly, denounced the Legislative Union, of which he was the

Digitized by Google

chief director, as corrupt and calamitous, atrocious in its principle, and abominable in its means.

"The Missionary" is open to objection, but is so improbable that it can hardly be deemed a dangerous novel. It is, in many parts, very rhapsodical; but the fault is, in some degree, attributable to the motley suggestions which the distinguished guests at Stanmore urged, and many of which the authoress, in compliment to her influential friends, laughingly adopted. The salient points of the narrative are, if we remember rightly, these. The Missionary is a Spanish priest, who repairs to India with a view to effect conversions to the church, of which he is himself a zealous and an able minister. Great success attends his labours at first, but in an evil hour, a Hindoo lady of surpassing beauty, whom he had addressed in the language of fraternal charity, brings her rich black eyes, charged with subduing amatory power, to bear, with deadly aim, upon him. The struggle between duty and inclination which follows, is in the highest degree terrific. In the course of a short time the lady is borne to eternity by an epidemic fever. Even the bed of death does not allay the unholy torment which rages within the Missionary's breast. He casts away his breviary and stole, and lives a sort of anchoritic life in the recesses of a gloomy cave for her sake. Eschewing scull and crucifix, his sole companion is a pet fawn, which had once belonged, and had been often caressed by the beautiful Luxima. How the ideal priest ended his days we do not now remember, nor is it of much consequence; but our impression is distinct that no good moral in conclusion attempts to palliate the sundry objectionable details through which the reader has been dragged. We should not have paused to notice at such length, a book worthy only of the Minerva

Digitized by Google

press, were it not that Lady Morgan herself, to the last moment of her life, attached some importance to it, although laughing airily enough at the wild romance and puerilities of the story. She considered that the picture it presented of Indian life, and some interesting oriental lore which it unfolded, possessed a certain didactic attraction, which far and away more than counterbalanced the defects of the story. That such was Lady Morgan's deliberate opinion, even after the lapse of forty years, we have the most conclusive evidence in the singular fact, that the veteran authoress had been engaged just before her death in completely remodelling the "Missionary," and in superintending its revision through the press. Lady Morgan considered that the Indian details with which the "Missionary" abounded, possessed for obvious reasons peculiar interest at that moment. When this romance was first published half a century ago, the East was very generally used as a *tabula rasa* for fictions of a didactic and romantic kind; but we might almost as justly expect that people would study Rassellas in order to learn the history and politics of Abyssinia, as to hope to gather accurate information regarding the state of India from this unworthy Missionary's escapades. Through the medium of "Luxima, the Prophetess; a Tale of India," they have been reproduced in a modified shape, within the last few months, and those who desire to read the narrative we have outlined, can do so at any circulating library.

In the list of distinguished persons at Stanmore during the period of Miss Owenson's sojourn there, we omitted to mention the name of Sir Thomas Lawrence, with whom she remained ever after on terms of warm cordiality. A characteristic portrait of Miss Owenson, from the pencil of Lawrence, taken at

Digitized by Google

the place and period in question, lies before us as we write. Leaning back on a *fauteuil* with an appearance of enjoyment and thorough *nonchalance*, she is dressed in a white robe, with short petticoats, and a shorter waist; her forehead almost entirely concealed by falling ringlets. "How pleasantly," writes Hepworth Dixon, "she described the days of Abercorn Priory, and of Lady Cork's 'blue parties,' where she starred it as a lioness, after the Thrales and Burneys of a past dynasty had vanished from the scene! These things made her historical, and Lady Morgan was to society and literature something of what the Great Duke had been to state-craft and war." "Lady Morgan's anecdotes of this brilliant period of her varied life," observes one who knew her well, "were told with a gracefulness and tact always favourable to the illustrious persons with whom she was then associated, and if she much extenuated she 'set down nought in malice.'"

We now approach the most important period in the domestic life of Miss Owenson. Mr. T. C Morgan was a surgeon and general medical practitioner in an English provincial town. The late Marquis of Abercorn in passing through it, *en route* for Tyrone, from his Scottish seat, Dudingstone House, Edinburgh, met with an accident which threatened dangerous results, and Surgeon Morgan was sent for. The Doctor was promptly in attendance, and for more than a week he remained night and day beside the noble patient's couch. Under the skilful treatment of Mr. Morgan, the Marquis at length became rapidly convalescent. He felt sincerely grateful to the young physician for his assiduous and efficient attention: and invited him on a visit to his Irish seat at Baron's Court, County of Tyrone, where the Marchioness was about to organ-

Digitized by Google

ize some splendid *fêtes champêtres.* The invitation was accepted. Anne, Marchioness of Abercorn, had a select circle of guests on a visit at the house, and amongst the number Miss Owenson. Mr. Morgan was a widower, but more literary and romantic and juvenile than the generality of widowers: a congeniality of taste brought him and the young authoress into frequent conversation. Time passed swiftly and gaily, but in the midst of this festivity and frolic a letter arrived, announcing the dangerous illness of Robert Owenson, and summoning his daughter Sydney to Dublin. With weeping eyes, and a aching heart—but not on Morgan's account—she bade the young widower a hurried adieu. Owenson made a short rally and survived until May, 1812. Surgeon Morgan, in the mean time, with a smitten heart followed Miss Sydney Owenson to Dublin; and persecuted her with declarations of the love which filled him to distraction. The popular Duke of Richmond invited the authoress and Mr. Morgan, to one of the private balls at the Viceregal Court. His Excellency, in the course of a lounging conversation with Miss Owenson, playfully alluded to the matrimonial report which had begun to be bruited about, and expressed a hope to have the pleasure, at no distant day, of congratulating her on her marriage. "The rumour respecting Mr. Morgan's *dévouement,*" she replied, "may or may not be true, but this I can at least with all candour and sincerity assure your Grace, that I shall remain to the last day of my life in single blessedness, unless some more tempting inducement then the mere change from Miss Owenson, to Mistress Morgan be offered me." The hint was taken and Charles, Duke of Richmond, in virtue of the powers of his office, knighted Surgeon Morgan upon the spot.

Digitized by Google

Leaving her father in improved health, Miss Owenson accepted the renewed invitation of the Marchioness of Abercorn, and returned to Baron's Court. In the "Gentleman's Magazine" of the day we read, "January 20th 1812, at Baron's Court, Tyrone, Sir C. T. Morgan, of London, to Sydney, eldest daughter of the veteran Irish Comedian Owenson, and author of 'The Wild Irish Girl,' and 'Woman, or Ida of Athens.'"

In connection with this desirable and happy alliance, there is an interesting and romantic, though very painful incident to be related. It is not by any means generally known, and we are indebted to the courtesy of Sir J. Emerson Tennent for having communicated it. We shall give the details in the words of that highly distinguished person. Speaking of Lady Morgan who dined at Sir Emerson's table a very short period previous to her death, he observes:

"One great tie between her and my family was the affection with which she regarded a mutual friend, many years dead, the late Major Crossley of Glenburn, near Belfast. And on the occasion I am now alluding to, Lady Morgan, during dinner, told me, for the first time, the story of their early intimacy. Major Crossley's family lived at Lisburn, where she became acquainted with him, when her father was on one of his professional tours, in the North of Ireland. She was then very young, and Crossley who was younger still, became so attached to her as to offer marriage. She told me she would have accepted him at once, but that neither of them could boast of possessing a single shilling, and the result was a prospective engagement, to be realized only so soon as means were apparent for their future subsistence. To devise this, she suggested as a

Digitized by Google

career, that an application should be made to the Marquis of Hertford for a cadetship in the Indian army, and as Crossley's family had some local claims, their request was successful, and he was speedily appointed to a regiment, in the Presidency of Madras.

"The correspondence continued for some years; though so interruptedly, that a considerable suspension took place, during which the lady's position and prospects had been uniformly rising, and her marriage was at length solemnized with Sir Charles Morgan, the ceremony having taken place at Baron's Court, the residence of Lord Abercorn, in the County Tyrone. On the morning of the wedding, the post arrived before the procession to the Church, and the sister of the bride took charge of her letters for Miss Owenson. These she opened on her return to the house; and amongst them was one from Crossley, accounting for his long silence by the anxieties of a period of uncertainty, which had now ended by his receiving some promotion in the army, and a staff appointment in the service of the Nizam. This was the long looked for point in his career, and having at last attained independence, he wrote to claim the performance of their early engagement, and propose an immediate union.

"The old lady told me this little novel—her animation heightened, at once by the romance and the reality of the story, and its recollection is enhanced to me by this having been one of the liveliest, as it was the last interview I ever had with Lady Morgan."*

* Letter from Sir J. Emerson Tennent to the Author, September 12th, 1859. We are fond of dates, and have accordingly obtained from the East India House, the following particulars regarding Captain Crossley's first commission and subsequent promotion

Digitized by Google

Lady Morgan would probably never have reached that great literary pre-eminence and celebrity, in the midst of which her days closed, were it not for her alliance with Sir Charles Morgan. She has repeatedly confessed the advantages which her mind and writings derived from his literary counsel and co-operation, and so lately as in Mr. Bryce's Railway Edition of her "Wild Irish Girl," the veteran authoress earnestly alludes to "the long and ennobling companionship with the great and cultivated intellect of one who taught and prized truth above all human good, and proclaimed it at the expense of all worldly interests—such were the advantages of a more mature life; such were the bright sources which threw in "new lights through chinks, which time had made."

Thomas Charles Morgan first saw the light in 1783, and was therefore the junior of his wife by eight years. He was the only son of Mr. John Morgan of Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury, who observing great intellectual promise in his son, spared no expense in procuring for him the benefits of a first class education. He first studied at Eton and the Charter House; at the age of eighteen he entered St. Peter's College, Cambridge, distinguished himself as a Greek scholar and a metaphysician, graduated as a Bachelor of Medicine in 1804, and obtained a medical diploma in 1809. Sir Thomas Charles Morgan, married first the daughter of Mr. William Hammond of Queen's Square, and by this lady he had one child, Anne Hammond Morgan, who married in 1828, the late Colonel St. John Blacker, and secondly, 30th April

"He arrived in India 13th November, 1806. Ensign, 4th January, 1807. Lieutenant, 5th September, 1811. Captain, 1st May, 1824. Retired from the service 4th January, 1836. Died, 18th September, 1846."—Ed.

Digitized by Google

1845, the Hon. George Browne, son of James, Lord Kilmaine.

The pleasure which filled Robert Owenson at the happy alliance of his daughter with Sir Charles Morgan, was of sadly short duration. In the Dublin newspapers of May 28th, 1812, we find his death announced with many earnest expressions of regret. The "Freeman" mentions, with other interesting facts, that "the revival of Irish Music within these last thirty years was entirely owing to his exertions, and his exquisite mode of singing his native airs, with their original words both in public and private. He was passionately fond of literature, and was well known as the protector of many young Irishmen of more talents than prudence. His conduct as a father (having early lost his wife), went far beyond the common line of parental duty and tenderness—his public life considered, it was unexampled." Another writer says: "'Alas! poor Yorick, I knew him well.' We might quote the whole of this beautiful passage from Shakspeare, as illustrative of the merits and talents of the gentleman who has lately paid the debt to nature, and whose public and private character deserves our greatest eulogium. We may say in honour of our country, that he was a true born Irishman, with all its native honour and goodness of heart. On the stage, none surpassed him in the Milesian walk, and the house often resounded with encores for the repetition of his songs, which always set the audience in a roar."

Owenson died at 44, North Great George's Street, at the residence of his son-in-law, Sir Arthur Clarke, M.D. who in 1808, had led Miss Olivia Owenson to the hymeneal altar. Having, in 1811, cured the Duke of Richmond of a cutaneous disease, Dr. Clarke received the honour of Knighthood, and the freedom of the

Digitized by Google

City of Dublin. In 1820 he established The Medicated Bathing Institution, No. 18, Lower Temple Street, which continued open to a comparatively recent period, and was productive of very beneficial results to suffering humanity. Sir Arthur always enjoyed a pun, and used sometimes call himself the Knight of the *Bath*. Although as small as Tom Moore, he loved to take the arm of Judge Day in the street, a man of colossal frame. The pair were, on one occasion, likened to the twenty-first of June, inasmuch as they jointly constituted *the longest day and the shortest knight*.

Sir Arthur published various medical treatises of much ability, including works on tubercular consumption, water, exercise, and diet. He was a strong advocate for the hydropathic system of medical treatment, and often had to bear many a stupid sneer from those who pertinaciously adhered to the old school and shut their eyes against conviction. Among those who laughed at the water cure was Charles Lamb. "There is nothing new or wonderful in it," he said dryly, "it is as old as the deluge, and in my opinion has killed more than it cured."

It was not until the publication of "O'Donnel, a National Tale," on March 1st, 1814, that Lady Morgan's claims to take her place among the best novelists of the age became cordially and universally recognised by the public. The authoress, as we have said, was never so thoroughly at home as when on Irish ground; and in illustration of this fact, the novels of "O'Donnel," "Florence M'Carthy," and "The O'Briens and O'Flahertys," are eminently conclusive. These three essentially Irish tales—green from cover to cover, and racy of the soil—form a national literary shamrock, of which Ireland may well be proud.

Digitized by Google

In the novel of "O'Donnel," Lady Morgan broke new ground. She ceased to guide the adventures of puerile novices of St. Dominick, crude Idas of Athens, and frail Spanish missionaries in India. O'Donnel was the vanguard of a host of Celtic ideal creations, profitable to study and worthy to imitate, which tended, in no small degree, to break down the Cockney prejudices which had so long existed, on the other side of the Channel, against Ireland. This novel displayed singular vigour of thought, and knowledge of mankind; and whether we laugh at the native eccentricities of M'Rory, sigh for the vicissitudes of the gallant O'Donnel, or smile at the lavish nothingness of fashionable life, we must acknowledge that we are under the influence of a spell with which true genius alone could invest us.

Having determined upon taking Ireland as her theme, she had sought in its records and chronicles for the ground-work of a story, and the character of a hero. The romantic adventures and unsubdued valour of O'Donnel the Red, Chief of Tirconnel, in the reign of Elizabeth, seemed at the first glance happily adapted to her purpose. At Baron's Court, Tyrone, the Irish seat of Lord Abercorn, a great portion of her work was written. Throughout the year 1812, we find Lady Morgan in correspondence with the late William Monck Mason, a man of considerable Celtic erudition, on the subject of her *magnum opus*. These interesting documents have been placed at our disposal.

The following letter is franked by Lord Abercorn, sealed with the name "Glorvina," and addressed to "W. Mason, Esq, Castle, Clontarf, Dublin." The Italics and Capitals are according to the MS.

Digitized by Google

"Baron's Court, February 25th, 1812.

"My dear Sir

"I perceive I could never get on without you. A thousand thanks for your communication, and for the trouble you have taken. Betham could greatly assist me, and with your interest, in my favor, I dare say will. Be it remembered that Hugh O'Donel (called "*Bal Deargh,*") the son of *Magnus* is MY MAN. I find many difficulties as to the domestic régime of the Irish *noblesse*—whether they burnt lamps, or *flambeaux,* whether they had any liquors besides Spanish wines, or whether they had glass in their castle windows; these are the kind of trifles that puzzle and retard me. Could Grose give me any information? and if you have him in your Library, will you *talk to him on the subject?*

"One more troublesome request, and I promise truce *for an age to come.* Can you possibly procure me Miss *Brooks'* translation of *Irish Poesy?*—I don't mind the price, *provided it is not* quite exorbitant; if you can get it for *love* or *money,* will you have it sent to Great George's Street, from whence it can come by *the mail,* and by the return of the post, I *will discharge* as much of the obligation as is *dischargeable.*

"I should like very much an Irish Motto in Irish character for the title page; should you meet with anything appropriate to *heroism and love of country,* keep it for me.

"I am quite delighted to find you are so successfully, and I trust *profitably* occupied; no one has the secret of enjoying life more completely than yourself; the enthusiasm with which you enter on your pursuits, and their own intrinsic rationality and tastefullness must be a source of exhaustless pleasure. How I envy you, your castle, your prospects, your

Digitized by Google

wood cutting, your planting, and above all the treasures of your library, and the pleasure you take in collecting and increasing them; add to these your *handsome Jane* and sweet children, and you may say 'a fig for the Sophy of Persia;' àpropos to handsome Jane, I suppose by this she has seen Olivia.

"Farewell, dear Sir, be a little less kind, and I shall be a little less troublesome; tho' never less sincerely and gratefully yours, than at this moment.

"S. O. M.

"Sir Charles longs to make the honour of your acquaintance; he is very much *in your own style;* that makes his *panegyric.*"

Lady Morgan had advanced as far as the second volume of her M.S., when she found it necessary to forego her original plan. "In touching those parts of Irish history," as she herself remarks, "which were connected with my tale, it would have been desirable to turn them into purposes of conciliation, and to incorporate the leaven of favourable opinion with that heavy mass of bitter prejudice, which writers, both grave and trifling, have delighted to raise against my country. But when I fondly thought to send forth a dove bearing the olive of peace, I found I was on the point of flinging an arrow winged with discord. I had hoped, as far as my feeble efforts could go, to extenuate the errors attributed to Ireland, by an exposition of their causes, drawn from historic facts; but I found that, like the spirit in 'Macbeth,' I should at the same moment hold up a glass to my countrymen, reflecting but *too* many fearful images. I discovered, far beyond my expectation, that I had fallen upon 'evil men, and evil

Digitized by Google

days;' and that in proceeding, I must raise a veil which ought never to be drawn, and should renew the memory of events which the interests of humanity require to be for ever buried in oblivion. I abandoned, therefore, my original plan, took up a happier view of things, advanced my story to more modern and more liberal times, and exchanged the rude chief of the days of old, for his polished descendant in a more refined age."

The object of this book was deep, and deserved, as it still deserves, an outburst of national respect and gratitude. Her introductory remarks to the edition of "O'Donnel," published in 1835, informs us that the book was "undertaken with an humble but zealous view to the promotion of a great national cause,—the Emancipation of the Catholics in Ireland. The attempt has been made the matter of grave censure, as a step beyond the position of the Author, and foreign to the scope of the genus. To this canon of criticism I cannot yet subscribe. Novels, like more solid compositions, are not exempted from the obligation to inculcate truth. They are expected, in their idlest trifling, to possess a moral scope; and politics are but morals on a grander scale. The appropriation of this form of composition to purposes beyond those of mere amusement, is not new. A novel is especially adapted to enable the advocate of any cause to steal upon the public, through the bye-ways of the imagination, and to win from its sympathies what its reason so often refuses to yield to undeniable demonstration. Even those sectarians who have taken the highest measure of moral propriety, and exclude with rigour all sources of amusement from the sphere of a religious life, have condescended thus to use the novel for the advancement of their particular opinions—as an organ not less legitimate, than powerful and effective."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

Critics' Cavils.—Sir W. Scott's opinion of "O'Donnel."—Sir C. and Lady Morgan's visit to France.—Publication of her Great Work.—The attack of the "Quarterly."—Reply to that Attack.—Lady Morgan grapples with her assailants.—Southey.—George the Third suggests to the "Quarterly."—Correspondence.—Jack Giffard.—The French Press on Lady Morgan.—Byron.—"Florence M'Carthy."—Correspondence.—Croker pilloried by Lady Morgan.—The Slanders upon her Fame and Name.—Lady Morgan's work on Italy.—Lady Caroline Lamb.—Lady Cork.—Denon and La Fayette.—Lady Morgan's Salon in Paris.—Her Singular Success.—Praised by Byron.—The "Quarterly" again. —"Glorvina! Glorvina! beware of the day!"

For forty years it was fashionable, among a band of ill-natured critics, headed by the late John Wilson Croker, to ridicule and sneer down Lady Morgan's pretensions as a novelist and a writer. Never had an author more formidable critical antagonism to contend with. Single-handed, Lady Morgan encountered this terrific, organized, and almost impregnable band; and one by one they fell, vanquished and prostrate, at her feet. Since the grave has closed over this brilliant woman's labours, a few have endeavoured to regain their feet; and availing themselves of an advantage so unworthy, they have sought to depreciate the abilities of her whom, living, they cravenly feared. It is pleasant, however, to be able to set the deliberately recorded opinion of the greatest novelist that ever lived, against the ill-natured, but perhaps not

Digitized by Google

uninfluential, snivelling, and drivelling to which we have alluded. Sir Walter Scott was himself a member of the Croker School in politics. He entertained an unconquerable aversion to Lady Morgan's liberal and progressive views; and the following remarks, committed to his private Diary, are therefore the more to be valued. "I have amused myself occasionally very pleasantly," he writes, "during the last few days, by reading over Lady Morgan's novel of 'O'Donnel,' which has some striking and beautiful passages of situation and description, and, in the comic part, is very rich and entertaining."

Shortly after the peace of 1814, Sir Charles and Lady Morgan, full of a grand literary scheme, proceeded to France, and took advantage of every available opportunity to "mark, note, study, and inwardly digest," the manners, customs, history, idiosyncracy, tendencies and political posture of that great nation.

It was no difficult task for Lady Morgan to draw upon her fertile brain for gushes of pleasant fiction; but in attempting to walk in the footsteps of Mungo Park, Eustace, Bruce, Campbell, and Buckhardt, she trod a new and most laborious path. The counsel and companionship of Sir Charles Morgan, however, proved an invaluable auxiliary. His sound judgment, philosophical mind, and firm principles, were well calculated to correct a woman's rapid inferences, and keep down the tone of a novelist's high colouring fancy. His only fault consisted in a tendency to materialism.

Though a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and constantly associating with distinguished members of that profession, Sir Charles Morgan relinquished medical practice at an early period of life, and devoted himself exclusively to literary and political pursuits. Sometimes, but not often, he

Digitized by Google

wrote, in a popular manner, on medical subjects. His "Outlines on the Philosophy of Life," had for its object the diffusion of a more general knowledge of the fundamental facts of Physiology. The book was an able one, and very successfully conveyed a popular view of the leading facts in Physiology, as they bear more especially on the moral and social animal.

In the autumn of 1815, we find Lady Morgan in France, picking up materials for her great work. General Lawless, the distinguished united Irish Refugee, writing to his kinsman, Lord Cloncurry, from Paris, on August 15th, 1815, says of Lady Morgan. "I like extremely this lady; she is agreeable, witty, and with as little conceit as can be found in a woman of her merit."

The thorough fascination which even a momentary interview with Lady Morgan produced, having become quite proverbial, peculiar facilities of access to the most exclusive circles of the gay metropolis, at once opened invitingly before her. Fated to encounter no *contretemps*, or, "accidents by flood and field," from which few travellers, forty years ago, were exempt, she was *fêted* in another sense wherever she went, and brilliant successes marked every step in her progress. No reserve was maintained—with the state of everything and everybody the Wild Irish Girl was made *au courant*. Intellectually enriched by these invaluable opportunities for observation, Lady Morgan's notes on France daily expanded beneath her hand, while their style glittered brilliantly from the polishing touches of her elaborating pen. Amid a fever of expectation at home and abroad, this remarkable book was at length born to the world. In France, the *Constitutionel*—then a most influential newspaper—reports progress: "La curiosité publique est vivement excitée

Digitized by Google

par l'annonce de la nouvelle ouvrage de Ladi Morgan —'La France'—des extraits en ont été déjà lus dans les reveles particuliers et ces essais ont produit le plus grand enthousiasme—on va presqu'à dire qu'il n'a été rien écrit de plus brilliant, ni qui donna une idée plus exacte de la société et des manières de Paris—cet ouvrage doit paraître à Paris et Londres en même temps dans la semaine prochaine, l'on ajoute que les critiques français taillent déjà leurs plumes!" The *Journal de Paris,* another highly influential newspaper, tells us:—"Lady Morgan has been run after, entertained, and almost worshipped in all our fashionable circles. She has studied us from head to foot, from court to village, from the boudoir to the kitchen. She has seen, observed, analysed and described everything, men and things, speeches and characters."

"France," which may be regarded as the *chef-d'œuvre* of Lady Morgan, is divided into eight books. The first treats of the peasantry; the second and third of society. The three next are devoted to an account of Paris. The seventh book is consecrated *aux spectacles.* The eighth and last, comprises sketches of the leading literary characters and eminent people of France, while the whole is richly spangled with a number of curious and out-of-the-way anecdotes.

This complicated and laborious task, Lady Morgan executed with all the spirit inherent to an ardent mind, and all the independance which is characteristic of an honest and a courageous one. Her remarks on French society, possessed peculiar interest, for they were not founded on hearsay, or on the result of metaphysical speculation, but were drawn from actual, and apparently very close observation. Exploring with care and accuracy the

Digitized by Google

springs of political action, among all the factions which then disturbed and distracted the breast of La Belle France, Lady Morgan's work, while it afforded the friends of Liberty a high and valued treat, stung corruption to madness and revenge. Energetically written, lively, but not flippant, original, without affectation, polished, but not labored, and graphic without redundancy, the reader finds himself transported into the midst of the gay scenes which she so vividly and temptingly pourtrays. Whether Lady Morgan converses with the glittering courtier, the *petit propriétaire* of a few acres, the lady of high rank, or the great literary or political lion, we make one of the party, and at length retire from the *conversazione*, sometimes instructed, often refreshed, always amused. But the *salons* of the great would seem to have had less attraction for Lady Morgan, than the practical acquaintance, which, for generous purposes, she formed with the French peasantry. Happy as seemed their condition, she did not view it with unmixed pleasure. When she beheld the bright cottage garden, and the various comforts of the contented French peasants, the remembrance of the then wretched, oppressed, and degraded population of her own country hurried to her mind, and furnished a contrast and comparison which, in a mind so sensitive as hers, must have created very painful sensations. "The finest flowers in France," she writes, "are now to be found in the peasant's garden—the native *Rose de Provence*—the stranger rose of India, entwine their blossoms, and grow together amidst the rich foliage of the vine, which scales the gable, and creeps along the roof of the cottage. I have seen a French peasant as proud of his tulips as any stock-jobber florist of Amsterdam, and heard him talk of his carnations as if he had

Digitized by Google

been the sole possessor of the *semper Augustus!* Oh! when shall I behold near the peasant's hovel in my own country other flowers than the bearded thistle which there raises its lonely head, and scatters its down upon every passing blast; or the scentless shamrock, the unprofitable blossom of the soil, which creeps to be trodden upon, and is gathered only to be plunged in the inebriating draught, commemorating annually the fatal illusions of the people, and drowning in the same tide of madness their emblems and their wrongs."

This pleasingly expressed allusion to the national practice of drowning the shamrock in a bowl of punch, does not seem to have proved intelligible to Lady Morgan's English critics; for her old foe, the "Quarterly Review," in a violent diatribe, triumphantly quoted the paragraph as a specimen of "the utter nonsense" which filled the book, and defied any reader to guess what such fine language as the above could possibly mean.

Lady Morgan's representations not being very favourable to the pretensions of legitimacy, her work, as a matter of course, was attacked with all the malignity and virulence for which the "Quarterly" when under the Croker and Giffard management, was celebrated. The unmanly attack of the Review recoiled on itself. People began to ask themselves if the cause which it advocated was so totally defenceless by argument, so inadequately supported by physical force, as to require all the aid of scurrility, misrepresentation, and falsehood, to repel the attacks of its opponents.

The critic's revival of the old taunt which charged all sentiments hostile to the narrow views of a faction with Jacobinism, was perhaps the less objectionable point in his review, since even the res-

Digitized by Google

tricted press of Paris had previously done justice to Lady Morgan's political sentiments, and acknowledged that she had drawn the true line of distinction between the friends of freedom, and the partisans of licence. Indeed all the critical torture which could possibly be applied to isolated passages, and *ex parte* statements, failed to disguise the spirit of British liberty in which her work was composed. For this reason we shall not stop to notice all the distortions, and disingenuous suppressions by which the reviewer sought to substantiate his charge. But as the elaborate article in question remains on record in every important library, public and private, it is only fair that we give the same permanence to a brief detection of some of the many "*ignorances and lies, by implication and deceit*" (to quote the reviewer's words) which animate his unmanly criticism.

Lady Morgan called the family of La Fayette "patriarchal," and this the critic absurdly construes into making La Fayette's children and grandchildren the *patriarchs*. Passing over the reviewer's misconception of the obvious elisions— "*no primogeniture*" for "no right of primogeniture," of "*Palais Conservateur*" for "Palais du Sénat Conservateur," &c., we arrive (p. 267) at another false statement. Lady Morgan does not "make the low stupid blunder" of mistaking Père Elise for a confessor: nor does she draw a comparison between his "spiritual influence over Louis XVIII., and that of Père de la Chaise over Louis XIV." Thirdly, the reviewer denies *bouquets d'arbres* to be good French. He ought to have known that it was not only a phrase in daily use, but employed by some of the best authors. Fourthly, he quarrels with the translation of "*menin*" by the word *minion*. The

Digitized by Google

offensive meaning attached to it rested, in this instance, solely with the reviewer. "*Like valour's minion,*" occurs in Macbeth. "Sweet Fortune's minion," and "*minions of the moon,*" in Henry IV. But a hundred other instances might be cited to justify Lady Morgan's application of this word. Menin is derived from *mener,* and signifies a friend, a follower. Fifthly, the etymology of Carousel, criticized at p. 269, is from Madame de Genlis, who surely ought to know French better than a British Reviewer.

Sixthly, Lady Morgan does not say that she knew persons who lived under Louis XIV. The reviewer must have been very ignorant of Parisian life not to have known that "*Voltigeur de Louis XIV,*" was then, and has been constantly since, applied in Paris as a *sobriquet* to the emigrant superannuated officers of the remodelled army. Seventhly, Lady Morgan did not mistake *Cherubin* for the singular number of *Cherubim.* This gratuitous charge rose out of the reviewer's ignorance that Cherubin is the name of the *maudit page* in Beaumarchais' comedy. Eighthly, Lady Morgan did not suppose the Battle of Fontenoy, at which the Irish Brigade obtained its memorable victory over the British, to have been fought under Louis XIV. She expressly attributes it to the reign of his successor—besides *compagnes à la rose* is not "jargon."

Ninthly, the reviewer seems not to have been aware that "the *atheist Voltaire*" wrote repeatedly and vehemently against atheism. Moreover, it would, perhaps, have slightly altered the critic's tone had he read the recently published book of Lord Broughton, in which many misapprehensions in regard to Voltaire's real views are dispelled, and the evidence of the man who acted for thirty

Digitized by Google

years as Voltaire's private secretary adduced, from which we learn that during that long period Voltaire was never known to utter, even in the unguarded intimacy of friendship, any remark of an infidel character. This, although strongly disapproving of Voltaire's writings, we deem it necessary to say.

Tenthly, Lady Morgan says:- "bastilles, lettres de cachet, mysterious arrest, and solitary confinement started upon my imagination, and I had already classed myself with the Iron Mask, and caged Mazarine, the Wilsons, Hutchinsons, and Bruces." To this the reviewer (p. 280) replies: "This is the *lie* by implication: Wilson, Hutchinson, and Bruce had grievously violated the laws; they were openly arrested, legally confined, publically tried, criminally sentenced, and generously pardoned." Now what are the facts? Wilson, Bruce and Hutchinson were buried *au secret* in the gloomy cells of La Force on a bailable offence. In this illegal confinement they were detained until they would confess the truth of the charge. After two months' detention they were accused of high treason, and remained one fortnight under that unjust accusation. At length the latter indictment was cancelled as an act of justice, and in opposition to the wishes and passions of the court and the government. Nor were they ever generously pardoned. At the expiration of their sentence, and after seven months' imprisonment, they were released from captivity.—See the "Morning Chronicle," of September 6, 1817.

Belying in their own conduct the Scripture precepts of "Charity envieth not, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth in the truth," and "Judge not that you be not judged," the Quarterly Reviewers coolly remind the reader that on a former occasion they

Digitized by Google

recommended the Bible to Lady Morgan's perusal, a request which they regret to find has been disregarded; while at p. 283, they inconsistently declare that Lady Morgan parodies Scripture for the purpose of turning it into ridicule, an accusation perfectly gratuitous.

But the most serious charge against the reviewer has yet to be made. Lady Morgan viewed many Catholic customs on the Continent with an eye of prejudice; and amongst the number certain processions in honour of the Blessed Vigin. It may be premised that in the revolutionary days of anarchy nearly every statue of the Holy Mother had been broken or defaced by sacrilegious hands, and Madonnas became very scarce in consequence. The reviewer disingenuously suppresses this fact, and garbles a passage of Lady Morgan's for the purpose of upbraiding her with licentious writing! After a damaging preamble the "Quarterly" quotes from our authoress: "The priests to their horror could not find a single *Virgin,* and were at last obliged to send to a neighbouring village to request *the loan of a Virgin.* A Virgin was at last procured; *a little indeed the worse for the wear*; but this was not a moment for fastidiousness, and the Madonna was paraded through the streets." The critic requests his readers (p. 281,) to consider what manner of woman she must be who displays such detestable grossness of which even a jest book would be ashamed, and cautions every parent against allowing Lady Morgan's work into his family, or his drawing-room. By referring to the original passage it will be perceived that the reviewer has carefully omitted the words "*to carry in procession.*"

This unworthy distortion has often since been adopted on the authority of the "Quarterly Review. It

Digitized by Google

may be found in Playfair's work on France. Lady Morgan in noticing some charges of immorality, which, in 1821, had been made upon her, said, "Once for all, I appeal from the reviewers to the works themselves. Let me be judged by what I have written; and not by the commentaries of my enemies, or the dislocated passages they choose to put forward for their own purposes."

The "Quarterly Review" in the same article strongly animadverted on Lady Morgan's admiration of the "vain, feeble, doating coxcomb, Lafayette." His deliberate resignation of the title of Marquis is not quite consistent with the character of *a vain coxcomb*. But let Lady Morgan vindicate him. In 1830 she thus referred to that flippant criticism. "It will scarcely be credited that such a statement, in defiance of historical fact, and of contemporary witnesses, and in utter recklessness of European opinion, should have been put forth to the British public, to work upon its timidity, and to insult its ignorance. Yet this picture of the idol of two great nations, of the friend of Washington and of Jefferson, of Fox and of La Rochefoucauld, of the respected of Napoleon, and the eulogised of Charles the Tenth—of the most illustriously virtuous man of his age and country, of the most consistent public character in ancient or modern story—this picture, in which every trait is a falsehood, and every touch a calumny, was risked by the paid organ of the British Government, and was received unquestioned by the British nation!"

Owing, we suppose, to the dearth of legitimate materials for hostile criticism, our reviewer found it expedient to devote considerable space to some strictures on the score of "bad spelling." But Lady Morgan's preface ought to have disarmed criticism,

Digitized by Google

at least on this head. "Having bound myself to my publisher," she writes, "to be ready for the Press before April, I was obliged to compose *à trait de plume,* to send off the sheets chapter by chapter, without the power of detecting repetitions by comparison, and without the hope of correction from the perusal of proof sheets. Printing in one country, and residing in another, it was not to be expected that the press would wait upon the chances of wind and tide, for returns, in, or out of course."

But it is useless to analyse further this unmanly attack. To complete the task of developing its mistakes and misstatements would exceed, if possible, the tediousness of its author. We shall therefore turn to a light poetical version of the critique which from its pith and point is not likely to fatigue the reader. It is from the pen of Sir Charles Morgan.

The book we review is the work of a woman,
A fact which we think will be guessed at by no man,
Who notes the abuse which our virulent rage,
Pours forth on its author, in every page,
And who is this *woman*—no *recent* offender,
A Jacobin, Shanavest, Whiteboy, Defender.

SHE who published "O'DONNEL," which (take but our word)
Is a monstrous wild "tissue of ALL THAT'S ABSURD"—
Indeed there's a something in all her romances,
Which, to tell our opinion, does not hit our fancies,
No, give us a novel whose pages unfold
The glories of that blessed æra of old,
When Princes legitimate trod on the people,
And the Church was so *high*, that it out-topp'd the steeple,
No, give us some Methodist's maudling confusion,
RELIGION in SEEMING, in FACT, PERSECUTION;
Some strange Anti-Catholic orthodox whining,
At this age of apostacy wildly repining!!

This WOMAN!—we scarce could believe when we read,
Retorts all the charges we heaped on HER head;

Digitized by Google

And leads to rebellion young authors, by shewing,
That calling *hard names* is by no means *reviewing*.
She boasts that we've not spoiled her market in marriage,
That vainly her morals and wit *we* disparage!
But surely that man is the boldest in life,
Who, in spite of OUR ravings, could take her for wife;
And therefore we now set him down without mercy
As the slave of enchantment, "THE VICTIM OF CIRCE."

Now to come to the matter in hand—we advance
'Tis "AN IMPUDENT LIE," when she calls her book "FRANCE;"
A title that would not be characteristic,
Unless for a large Gazeteer or Statistic.

* * * * *

Next comes her arrangement!—when this we denounce
We must eke out our charge with a bit of a bounce;
And o'erlook the confusion which reigns in our head,
To charge it at once, on HER book in the stead—
Of this book, my good readers, in vain you may hope
An account of its merits, its plan or its scope;
For the tale *she* relates does not chime with the view
Which *we* take of France in our *loyal review*.
And though we should rail, till our paper were shrinking,
Alas! we should but *set the people a thinking;*
On the list of ERRATA 'twere better to seize,
For thence we may conjure what blunders we please.

These, mixed with the few, which the best author makes,
In a work of such length, and *our own worse mistakes;*
With some equivocation, and some "*direct lies*,"
Of abuse will provide our accustomed supplies;
Which largely diluted with loyalty rant,
With much hypocritical methodist cant,
Misquotations, mistatements, distortions of phrase,
Will set the HALF-THINKERS (we judge) in amaze,
And this "WORM MOST AUDACIOUS," this "woman so mad,"
This compound of all that's presumptuous and bad,
(Tho' we should not succeed in repressing her book,
And the youth of our land on its pages still look,)
Will perceive, with her friends, midst the people of fashion,
That the "Quarterly" scribe's in a desperate passion—

Postscriptum—we'd near made a foolish omission
And forgotten a slur on her second Edition.

Digitized by Google

Though perhaps, after all, she may have the last word,
And reply to our "wholesome" remarks—by a third—
And thus, like a sly and an insidious joker,
The malice defeat of an *hireling* CROKER !!!

The allusion in the foregoing to her Ladyship having retorted the charges of the "Quarterly," has reference to some spirited observations which occurred in the Preface to the first edition of "France." It may be perceived that Lady Morgan received the furious charge of the "Quarterly" on the point of her already fixed bayonet. "While I thus endeavour," she goes on to say in a preface which modestly sought to excuse some trivial imperfections incidental to the haste with which the book was written, "while I thus endeavour to account for faults, I cannot excuse; and to solicit the indulgence of *that public* from whom I have never experienced severity, I make no effort to deprecate *professional criticism*, because I indulge no hope from its mercy. There is *one* review, at least, which must necessarily place me under the ban of its condemnation; and to which the sentiments and principles scattered through the following pages (though conceived and expressed in feelings, the most remote from those of *local* or *party* policy) will afford an abundant source of accusation, as being foreign to its own narrow doctrines, and opposed to its own exclusive creed. I mean the 'Quarterly Review.' It may look like presumption to hope, or even to fear its notice; but *I*, at least, know by experience, that in the omniscience of its judgment it can stoop, 'To break a butterfly upon a wheel.' It is now nearly nine years since that review selected me as an example of its unsparing severity; and deviating from the true object of criticism, made its strictures upon one of the most hastily composed and insignificant of my *early* works a vehicle for an unprovoked

Digitized by Google

and wanton attack upon the personal character and principles of the author. The slander thus hurled against a young and unprotected female, struggling in a path of no ordinary industry and effort, for purposes sanctified by the most sacred feelings of nature, happily fell hurtless. The public of an enlightened age, indulgent to the critical errors of pages composed for its amusement, under circumstances, not of vanity or choice, but of *necessity*, has, by its countenance and favour, acquitted me of those charges under which I was summoned before their awful tribunal, and which tended to banish the accused from society, and her works from circulation; for 'licentiousness, profligacy, irreverance, blasphemy, libertinism, disloyalty, and atheism,' were no venial errors. Placed by that public in a definite rank among authors, and in no undistinguished circle of society, alike as *woman* and as author, beyond the injury of malignant scurrility, whatever form it may assume, I would point out to those who have yet to struggle through the arduous and painful career that I have ran, the feebleness of unmerited calumny, and encourage those who receive with patience and resignation the awards of dignified and legitimate criticism, to disregard and contemn the anonymous slander with which party spirit arms its strictures, under the veil of literary justice.

"In thus recurring to the severe chastisement which my early efforts received from the judgment of the 'Quarterly Review,' it would be ungrateful to conceal that it placed 'My bane and antidote at once before me;' and that in accusing me of 'licentiousness, profligacy, irreverence, blasphemy, libertinism, disloyalty, and atheism,' it presented a *nostrum* of universal efficacy, which was to transform my *vices* into *virtues*, and to render me, in its

Digitized by Google

own words, 'not indeed a good writer of novels, but a *useful friend*, a *faithful wife*, a *tender mother*, and a respectable and happy *mistress of a family*.'

"To effect this purpose, 'so devoutly to be wished,' it prescribed a simple remedy; 'To purchase immediately a *spelling book*, to which, in process of time, might be added a *pocket dictionary*, and to take a few lessons in joining-hand; which superadded to a little common sense, in place of idle raptures,' were finally to render me that valuable epitome of female excellence, whose price Solomon has declared above rubies.

"While I denied the crimes thus administered to, I took the advice for the sake of its results; and like 'Cœlebs in search of a wife,' with his ambulating virtues, I set forth with my MAVOR and ENTICK in search of that conjugal state, one of the necessary qualifications for my future excellencies. With my dictionary in my pocket, with my spelling book in one hand, and my copper-plate improvements in the other, I entered my probation; and have at last (thanks to the 'Quarterly Review') obtained the reward of my calligraphic and orthographic acquirements. As it foretold, I am become, in spite of the 'seven deadly sins' it laid to my charge, 'not indeed a good writer of novels,' but, I trust, 'a respectable,' and, I am *sure*, 'a happy mistress of a family.'

"In the fearful prophecy so long made, that I should never write a *good* novel, the 'Quarterly Review,' in its benevolence, will at least not be displeased to learn that I have written some that have been *successful*; and that while my Glorvinas, Luximas, and Lollottes, have pleaded my cause at home, like '*very Daniels*,' they have been received abroad with equal favour and indulgence; and that 'O'Donnel' has been transmitted to its author, in

Digitized by Google

three different languages. Having thus, I hope, settled 'my long arrear of GRATITUDE with Alonzo,' I am now ready to begin a new score; and await the sentence of my quondam judge, in the spirit of one,

> "'Who neither courts nor fears
> His favour nor his hate.'"

But even assuming that Lady Morgan's talents were far from being of the first order, the violent denunciations of her reviewers were quite unjustifiable. It had hitherto been held a sacred maxim in the canons of criticism that when a female became a candidate for literary fame, even though her merits were not of the brightest, her very sex formed an appeal to the heart which forbid acrimony of censure, much less violent invective, or falsity of accusation, and secured at least the appearance of respect, even in the absence of those complimentary speeches which have been considered, from time immemorial, a species of homage justly due to the fair sex. In "The Statesman," an able Whig newspaper of the day, the authorship of the violent attack of the "Quarterly" which charged Lady Morgan with little short of the seven deadly sins, is confidently attributed not to Croker, but to the pen of the laureats Robert Southey. We transcribe a portion of this article. The violent tone of recrimination which pervaded Whig and Tory antagonism in those days is curious to glance back upon. "As Burke said," observes 'The Statesman,' "'*the age of chivalry is gone,*' and a race of literary ruffians and political *renegades* have sprung up, who, to repay the world for the detestation in which they are held, spurn at every honourable feeling; and, insensible to the restraints of conscience, neither regard the claims of

Digitized by Google

age or sex, of wisdom or virtue, but wage rude and indiscriminate war with all who will not consent to be as base, wicked, and infamous as themselves. By one of these literary assassins, Lady Morgan has had the honour of being attacked. It comes from the pen of that skulking and malignant *renegade*, the author of 'Wat Tyler,' and appears in that ponderous production of scurrility and venom, the 'Quarterly Review.' In this attack, all that is contemptible in the *petty*, all that is cowardly and cutting in the *malignant*, all that is scurrilous in *vulgar venom*, are employed to wound the feelings and injure the reputation of Lady Morgan. Would it be believed, that, in this age and country, a being so thoroughly despicable and degraded could be found, as to charge this lady with all that is *false*, all that is *licentious*, all that is *blasphemous*. All who are acquainted with the 'Wild Irish Girl,' and 'O'Donnel,' will know what station to assign the pensioned renegade, who has thus, with savage ferocity, assailed her reputation. Here, for the present, we take leave of this apostate and his prostituted labours, until we have an opportunity of contrasting some of his own Jacobinical works, with his recent lucubrations in his dark and scowling 'Quarterly Review.'"

In the selection from Southey's letters, edited by his son, we find no allusion to this critical assault on Lady Morgan; although Southey repeatedly speaks of his laborious contributions to the "Quarterly," and of the high estimation in which they were held by the Government. Lord Liverpool, we learn, sent for Southey, and overwhelmed him with protestations of gratitude and esteem. Warter's selection of Southey's letters, reveals that George the Third intermeddled with some political articles in the "Quarterly Review."

Digitized by Google

Blackmarked by the "Quarterly;" denounced by "Blackwood;" poo-pooed by the pious "Mail" and "Packet;" and scowled at by puritanical old dowagers, poor Lady Morgan's Irish receptions began to exhibit some temporary symptoms of a falling off in fashionable attendance. As a cruel cotemporary Tory satire has it:

> "While carriages roll thro' the street of KILDARE,
> Due south to the GREEN, and due north to the SQUARE,
> Will none check their steeds, as in triumph they prance,
> At the door of the travelling lady from France?"

The "Freeman's Journal" was not alone the most influential of the liberal organs of Ireland at the period of which we write, but enjoyed a circulation exceeding that of any of its contemporaries, as appears from an official return published in the "Freeman" of May 17, 1817. The editor of this journal from 1813 to 1818, was Michael Staunton, Esq., now an important public officer in Dublin. In Lady Morgan's recently published "Odd Volume," Mr. Staunton is twice alluded to, first (p. 149) in a letter dated Paris, October 31, 1818, and again in another communication, dated March, 1819. The following letter, chronologically in place here, is addressed to Mr. Staunton:—

Private.

"Lady Morgan presents her compliments to the Editor of the 'Freeman's Journal.' Having learnt that during her recent absence from Dublin, he has had the kindness to mention her new work with approbation, she takes the earliest opportunity of offering her acknowledgments. She begs at the same time to mention, that as the hireling presses of London, Paris, and Dublin, are at this moment let *loose against her work on France,* and as the 'Dublin Journal' has declared that the *long tirade* it has

Digitized by Google

inserted against her from 'Galignani's Messenger,' has been translated *expressly for its columns!* Lady Morgan would be extremely happy to place in the hands of the Editor of the 'Freeman's Journal' some French *critiques on her work,* this moment received from Paris, and done by the most eminent literary characters on the continent, and forming a complete refutation to the paragraphs inserted in the 'Courier,' 'Dublin Journal,' &c., &c.

"If the Editor could call on Lady Morgan any *time to-morrow,* and mention at *what hour,* Lady Morgan will be happy to see him, and trusts that he will have the goodness to pardon the trouble she gives him in favour of a cause of which he has already shewn himself the unsolicited, able and liberal champion."

The ludicrous blunder about "Galignani's Messenger" is quite characteristic of the "Dublin Journal." This newspaper was first established by Alderman Faulkner, the friend of Swift, Chesterfield, and the leading politicians and literateurs of the time. Faulkner having ably edited the paper for fifty years, it at length came into the hands of an illiterate and illiberal person named John Giffard, who infused into its tone such "violence, virulence, vulgarity, and mendacity, that in the present date its advocacy would be held detrimental to the cause of any party." Yet Giffard, originally a blue-coat boy, was preferred to places of honour and emolument by the Government. Giffard's personal demeanour was as morose as his pen was truculent; and for many years he enjoyed the sobriquet of "the dog in office," and his paper that of "the Dog's Journal." Giffard having accused Grattan of treasonable designs, the great orator retorted thus: "It proceeds from the

Digitized by Google

hired traducer of his country, the excommunicated of his fellow citizens, the regal rebel, the unpunished ruffian, the bigoted agitator. In the city, a firebrand; in the court, a liar; in the streets, a bully; in the field, a coward. And so obnoxious is he to the very party he wishes to espouse, that he is only supportable by doing those dirty acts the less vulgar refuse to execute." Giffard pocketed the insult. The last number of the "Dublin Journal" appeared in 1825.

Lady Morgan concludes her letter to Mr. Staunton with a remark complimentary to the "Freeman's Journal." This cannot be classed among the empty compliments which some people are fond of paying to their friends through the safe and comparatively irresponsible medium of private letters, but which they would shirk from stating publicly or in print. A stern sense of sincerity and consistency formed one of Lady Morgan's fairest characteristics. Among the notes to the first chapter of "Florence M'Carthy," it is declared that "The 'Freeman's Journal' is one of the most spirited, popular, and best conducted papers in the Empire."

"Le Journal des Débats," the organ of the French Court, was the architype from which all the minor revilers of Lady Morgan took their tone. From these dull plagiaries, in which scurrility takes the place of analysis, and flippant assertion is substituted for proof, it is gratifying to turn to the more important and liberal criticisms of the "Journal Général," the "Journal de Paris," "Chronique de Paris," "Le Constitutionel," and "Mercure de France." It was to these critiques that Lady Morgan, in her letter to Mr. Staunton, refers. One, from the pen of Benjamin Constant, the distinguished orator and constitutionalist, we are tempted to transcribe. Constant refutes in detail,

Digitized by Google

and with admirable temper, the petulant objections advanced by Lady Morgan's foes. "If," he writes, "she had represented the French as a debased and depraved nation; if she had lamented over the corruption of manner, and the absence of morality and religion; if, in short, in comparing the existing moment with former epochs, she had presented a touching eulogium of the Gabelle and the Corvée (of which she does not speak with the greatest reverence,) it is possible that her work would have been vaunted as a *chef-d'œuvre*, her literary heresies would have been passed over, and every formula of praise would have been employed to push her writings into public estimation. But Lady Morgan prefers a Constitutional Government to arbitrary powers; she elevates France, as it now is, above the France of former times; and these are faults which no virtues can redeem. It has been made a serious charge against her, that she has attempted to excuse the crimes of the revolution. I have read her work and find no ground for such an accusation. Wherever the author speaks of that period of mourning and anarchy, the reign of terror, her language expresses the indignation with which she is penetrated. Whence then can this charge have originated? It is not difficult to discover. Lady Morgan does not unite in the same proscription the genuine lovers of liberty, and those sanguinary monsters, who, while invoking its name, were its most bitter enemies; she does not make it a crime in the Patriots of 1789, that they were ignorant of the secret of futurity; she absolves Philosophy from the errors of ignorance, and from the excesses of faction—and such opinions are not to expect toleration. The distinction she has thus drawn between the partisans of license, and the sincere friends of a regulated liberty, does honour to her discernment; it is just; and it requires all the

Digitized by Google

blindness of thwarted personal interest not to perceive it. Such are the opinions of Lady Morgan, and it is in this sense alone that she is *revolutionary*; she will console herself from imputations thus hazarded, by reflecting how difficult it is, at certain epochs, to *speak the truth*, without injuring interests and shocking prejudices, which resist all modification or compromise. She will console herself, above all, in the conviction, that every enlightened and liberal mind will applaud the use she has made of her rare talents in the work under consideration."

An eminent thinker has said, that were we to call everything by its right name we should be stoned in the streets; and the reception which Lady Morgan's frank and truthful book met with tended to confirm the apothegm. In De Constant she found a steadfast and able ally. Strong links of friendship continued to bind them together until the death of the great constitutionalist in 1830 broke them up.

The wholesome truths to which our authoress gave energetic expression led to a decision on the part of the then French Government, to refuse her re-admission to the country—a mandate, which, as we shall see, both Sir Charles and Lady Morgan, conscious of their rectitude, disregarded.

The attack made on "France," in the "Quarterly Review," produced an effect as unexpected by the author as the critic. It promoted the sale of the work it was intended to suppress, of which four editions in England, two in France, and four in America were rapidly exhausted. "Even the chiefs of the Tory Party," said Lady Morgan, "affected in public to be ashamed of the clumsy and ungentlemanly manner in which their work was done. In private, however, they asked the reviewers to their tables, on the strength of such exertions."

Digitized by Google

Lord Byron was no admirer of Lady Morgan, and abused her Athenian heroine in one of the notes to "Childe Harold." Yet even he, as we gather from a private letter addressed by him to his friend Murray, publisher of the "Quarterly," thought the tone of that organ towards Lady Morgan unjustifiable. "What cruel work you make with Lady Morgan. You should recollect that she is a woman: though, to be sure, they are now and then very provoking: still, as authoresses, they can do no great harm, and I think it a pity so much good invective should have been laid out upon her when there is such a fine field of us, Jacobin gentlemen, for you to work upon."

As soon as the personal excitement and dissipation of mind which succeeded the publication of "France" had subsided, Lady Morgan devoted all her energies to a new national tale, with historical features, which under the title of "Florence M'Carthy," appeared a short time afterwards. The best points in the native Irish character, with the richest flowers of the Irish dialect, were sketched with a masterly hand by Lady Morgan; and there can be no doubt that Banim, Griffin, and Carleton drew much of their inspiration in depicting peasant life from the same source. Previous to attempting this exceedingly interesting and erudite novel, Lady Morgan, as was her wont, saturated her memory with a large amount of reading, which bore upon the subject of it. From the late Mr. Mason, author of the "History of St. Patrick's Cathedral Church," then in progress of composition, Lady Morgan received much acceptable assistance in this respect.

"My dear Sir,—I have done all with Mr. O'Halloran that can be done with, and so send him adrift. I have still five volumes of yours—would you lend me, for a few hours, Sir Richard Colt Hoare's Travels?

Digitized by Google

—I long for a fine dry evening that I may walk down and drink tea with 'the lovely Mrs. Mason and her old china,' and gossip with you and see your great work. I always forget to ask you whether she or you have had my little 'France,' and if not, will you let me lend it to you?

"Would you get some of your Irish scholars to translate the following elegant phrases into Irish, written in Roman characters, as I don't read Ogham with facility:

"'The Devil go with him.' 'My blessing on him—or on you.'

"'I don't speak English.' 'Is that you?' 'Where are you come from?' 'Where have you been?'

"What is the meaning of '*musha*,' a word in frequent use, and '*agus*?'

"Send me back your own bit of red tape to tie round the rest of your books when I return them to you. "S. M.

"P.S.—Morgan makes me open his letter to tell Mrs. Mason he dies to kiss her hand."

Amongst the out-of-the-way national lore with which we find Lady Morgan filling her brain at this period, may be mentioned the "Annals of Tigernach," the "Psalter of Cashel," and the "Annals of the Four Masters." In most of the evidence furnished by these valuable historical documents, Lady Morgan seems to have been an unbeliever. "With respect to the evidence of Irish chronicles—beginning with Nennius who asserts that in the sixth year of Abraham, Parthalanus ruled in Ireland," wrote Lady Morgan in 1846, "I have long since registered my scepticisms under the head of 'Irish Historians,' in the 'Book Without a Name;' and the dreamy influence and misdirected pride they tend to nourish, I have endeavoured to shadow out in the character

Digitized by Google

of the insane schoolmaster, Terence Oge O'Leary, in 'Florence M'Carthy,' and in that of the Baron O'Brien, in the 'O'Briens and O'Flahertys.'"

"No one," writes Disraeli, "could lash a woman like Rigby." The same remark applies to Croker. Knowing that Lady Morgan was sensitive on the subject of her age, he took a mean revenge by henceforth uniformly speaking of her as "*Miss Owenson of the eighteenth century.*"* The continental press echoed this absurdity with a vengeance. In the "Quotidienne" of August 4th, 1821, we read that "Lady Morgan, long temps connue dans le siècle dernier sous le nom de Miss Owenson."

Often has the name of Lady Morgan been taken in vain since. See, for instance, the "Universal Lexicon of Leipsic," where, among other fictions, it is asserted that "Lady Morgan, in a fit of disappointed love, put an end to her life by the aid of her own cambric pocket-handkerchief!"

Mr. Croker's feeling of irritation knew no bounds. He endeavoured to annoy Lady Morgan by calling her "a female Methusalem;" he laboured to discover the date of her birth, but could not. "Croker," observes the 'Athenæum,' "issued a commission of inquiry—himself inquirer, jury, and judge against his brilliant countrywoman; and the pretended discoveries of that acrimonious partizan amused the reading and talking world of London for a whole season."

* Mr. Jeafferson, in his "Novels and Novelists" (v. ii. p. 379) gravely follows Croker: "Lady Morgan's literary career commenced in the last century, years before Byron published a line, or Moore had fascinated voluptuaries with Little's Poems. Her first volume was a collection of short pieces in verse, and was produced ere she had completed her fourteenth year." This little book appeared, as we have seen, in 1801, when Sydney Owenson had entered on her twenty-fifth year.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Croker was proverbially, and often offensively inquisitive. But in cross-examining Mrs. Clarke, so far back as 1809, he caught a Tartar. Demanding to know how often she had seen Mr. Dowler, the Duke of York's mistress retorted: "I believe the honourable gentleman can tell pretty well; for his garret-window, very convenient for his prying disposition, overlooks my house." Mr. Croker was at this time member for Downpatrick.

The virulence with which Mr. Croker pursued his gifted countrywoman was remarkable. To cause her a pang he never let an opportunity slip. For instance, in reviewing the "American Sketches" of Mr. Fearon, an English gentleman, who had incidentally given a kind word to Lady Morgan, Mr. Croker writes:—"He grossly libels his fair countrywomen in representing them fond of the writings of Lady Morgan. From 'Ida of Athens,' the first of her monstrous progeny, to that last souterkin of dullness and immorality, 'Florence M'Carthy,' they view them all with equal disgust."

In a review of Hazlitt's "Table Talk" (v. xxvi, p. 107) "the ravings of a maniac" are applied to the writings of Lady Morgan. In vol xvii. p. 223 the unmanly epithet, "unwomanly brutality" is affixed to her, while (at p. 264, and *seq.*) her alleged "blunders, bombast, and falsehood" come under Mr. Croker's lash. The violence of the censure saved her. Mr. Croker would seem to have been unaware that temperate criticism, and what an eminent writer has termed, ***under-statement,*** are far and away more effective than roaring denunciation.

It is generally an injudicious course for an author to give battle to critics who are almost sure to have the best of it; but the lacerating poignancy of satire combined with the intrepidity of vengeance, with

Digitized by Google

which Lady Morgan retorted upon them gave her a decided vantage ground. The admirably rich character of Counsellor Con Crawley in "Florence M'Carthy" was at once recognised as John Wilson Croker; and Moore has recorded the fact that Croker winced more under the caricature than any of the many direct attacks which were made upon him. The sixth chapter of "Florence M'Carthy" introduces us to the Crawley family:—"If ever there was a period in the history of a country when it might be said, that 'Crime gave wealth, and wealth gave impudence,'" observes Lady Morgan, "it was that period in the history of Ireland, when rebellion, excited for the purpose of effecting an unwelcome Union, called forth all the worst passions of humanity, and armed petty power with the rod of extermination. The wealth, influence, and importance of the Crawley family took their date from that memorable and frightful epoch in the tragedy of Irish history, which produced both moral and political ruin to a long-devoted country, under every form of degradation, of which civilized society is susceptible. Previous to that period, the three brothers had remained buried in the obscurity which belonged to their social and intellectual mediocrity. The eldest, Darby Crawley, the country attorney, found his highest dignity in being the factotum of the two Barons Fitzadelm, the agent of their embarrassed property, on which he lent them money saved by his father in their service, until the little that remained of the estate fell into his hands. Through the interest of his employer, he had been put into the commission of the peace: the year 1798 found him a magistrate, and fortune and his *merits* had done the rest. The second brother, whose gravity was mistaken for ability by his father, (the illiterate land-

Digitized by Google

bailiff of the Fitzadelms) was made a gentleman by the patent of a college education, and the legal degree of barrister-at-law. He had plied in the courts with an empty green bag, and more empty head, year after year with fruitless vigilance, till his energy, in the melancholy prosecutions produced by the rebellion, obtained him notice, patronage, place, and a silk gown."

But let us pass on to chapter the sixteenth, where Lady Morgan figures as Lady Clancare, and some of Counsellor Con's flippant criticisms find expression.

"I think," said Lord Frederick, taking his coffee, and throwing himself on a divan, near Lady Georgiana, "we all appear to be buried in the tomb of the Capulets. I had no idea the divine Marchesa meant to consign us all to such immortal dulness. We are already almost reduced *aux muets interprètes*, and shall gradually fall into the eloquent silence of that round-eyed, tongue-tied, Lady Clancare, who *par parenthèse* looks as if she were extracting us all for her common-place book, and will doubtless bring us out in hot-press, *sans dire gar!*"

"I doubt she will ever bring out anything half so good," said Conway Crawley: "as yet that is not in her line; she has had too few opportunities of studying fashionable life to attempt anything in that way. Her position here, at least, is so extremely obscure, that I believe the Castle of Dunore is the first fine house in the country into which she was ever admitted."

"And," said Miss Crawley, smiling, and in spite of her former discomfiture, unable to contain her acrimonious spirit, "and perhaps it may be her last."

"Her principles," continued young Crawley, "as

Digitized by Google

disseminated in her 'National Tales,' as she calls them, are sufficient to keep her out of good society here."

"I thought I had heard you say, Mr. Crawley," observed Mr. Daly, "that you did not know Lady Clancare was an author."

"I did not till this morning," said Crawley, a little confused. "When Lady Dunore mentioned the titles of her works, and the initials representing the author's name, I recollected having looked over those tomes of absurdity and vagueness, of daring blasphemy, of affectation, of bad taste, bombast, and nonsense, blunders, ignorance, Jacobinism, falsehood, licentiousness,* and impiety, which it now seems are the effusions of the pseudo Lady Clancare."

Young Crawley, already flushed with wine, grew still more red with rage as he spoke.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Crawley," interrupted Lord Frederick, with unusual vivacity, "say no more, or you will make us in love with the author and her work together; for, really, a book that could combine all these terrific heterogeneous qualities, and yet be read, must be very extraordinary: *pour le moins*."

"Very extraordinary indeed," said Mr. Daly, "considering that with all these vices and faults, they have been so read, and bought, as to realize an independence for their author, and enable her to carry on a suit which has deprived the elder Mr. Crawley of his dear Clotnottyjoy. It would at least

* This was a most singular and happy anticipation of a judgment of the "Quarterly Review." Exactly eleven years afterwards, in a violent diatribe on Maynooth (v. 37, p. 484) the "O'Briens and O'Flahertys" is referred to as "a strange farrago of ignorance, licentiousness, and Jacobinism." Mr. Cyrus Redding, in his recently published "Fifty Years Recollections," says that the "Quarterly's" attacks on Lady Morgan, generally attributed

Digitized by Google

appear, that in spite of professional criticism, the public are always with her."

"Oh, her flippant and arrogant ignorance has its market," returned Conway Crawley, "and the sylphed Miss M'Carthy, the elegant Lady Clancare, is, in fact, a mere bookseller's drudge. Her impudent falsehoods, and lies by implication, the impious jargon of this mad woman, this audacious worm——"

"Are you speaking of Lady Clancare, sir?" said General Fitzwalter, who had been talking to Lord Adelm, but who now turned shortly round upon young Crawley, with a tone and look that stunned the hardy railer, "are you applying such language to a woman—to any woman?"

Counsellor Crawley, who was physically timid, shrinks back abashed, and takes up a book; while the marchioness enters leaning upon Lady Clancare's arm. "We have had a delicious walk of some miles," said Lady Dunore, sinking into a chair and calling for coffee; while Lady Clancare modestly took her seat rather behind than beside, so as just to raise her face over the back of Lady Dunore's chair, in a position equally shy and observing. For a moment she attracted every eye, and all sought to trace in her countenance some indication of the audacious, lying, profligate, ignorant, and pretending Jacobin."

Sir Jonah Barrington, a man whose knowledge of Ireland and the Irish character, was singularly intimate and profound, writes of "Florence M'Carthy," "The Crawleys are superlative, and suffice to bring

to Croker, were really written by Giffard, in whom vulgarity was inherent. Giffard, however, ceased to edit the "Quarterly" in 1823, and died in 1826. The above passage first appeared in 1828, and it is impossible to doubt that it owes its existence to the same pen that had so often previously assailed Lady Morgan with such vulgarity and mendacity.—Ed.

Digitized by Google

before my vision, in their full colouring, and almost without a variation, persons and incidents whom and which I have many a time encountered. Nothing is exaggerated as to them; and Crawley himself is the perfect and plain model of the combined agent, attorney and magistrate—a sort of mongrel functionary, whose existence I have repeatedly repudiated, and whom I pronounce to be, at this moment, the greatest nuisance and mischief experienced by my unfortunate country."

It was certainly a far-fetched charge to accuse Lady Morgan of Atheism; and yet with this repulsive crime, the Tory Reviewers repeatedly upbraided her. How they could venture to advance an accusation so startling, in the face of such ample irrefragable evidence to the contrary, will not fail to surprise modern notions of honour, gallantry and justice. Few writers made finer, or more impressive appeals and allusions to the Deity than Lady Morgan. "Gracious heaven!" she exclaims: "Is it for man, weak man, trembling in the consciousness of his own imbecility, to bear down upon his weaker brother? And should not every sluice of pity and toleration, be opened in his bosom for the fallibility of that creature whose nature he wears, in whose frailties he participates, and to whose errors he is liable? Atoms as we are in the boundless space of creation! surrounded by mystery, involved in uncertainty, knowing not from whence we came, or whither we shall go, beings of an instant; with all our powers, all our energies hastening to decay! Is it for us to assume the right of empire, and refuse that mercy to others, which we all look for in common to Him, who is Himself perfection?"

For year after year this amiable and accomplished woman continued to be branded as an atheist in religion, and a latitudinarian in morals. "No matter

Digitized by Google

with what ability slanderous attacks may be refuted," says Jerdan, "some of the dirt is sure to stick to you." Lady Morgan's case was no exception to the apothegm. Even since she has tranquilly passed into eternity, there has been no disinclination in some quarters to fasten the guilt of infidelity on her life and soul. But no charge can possibly be more base or baseless. We have taken some trouble to be able to disprove it; and it is with no small pleasure that we find ourselves in a position to state, on the authority of a lady who possessed the friendship and confidence of Lady Morgan, that the great authoress never allowed a day to pass over without reading a chapter from the Sacred Scriptures. Indeed, Lady Morgan's acquaintance with the Bible can be doubted by none who read "Woman and her Master," the Controversy with Cardinal Wiseman, and the preface to "The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys," not to speak of many other productions of her pen. "Woman and her Master" displays almost as thorough an intimacy with the Sacred Volume as the writings of Locke or Whately. But to show how strongly the virulently fostered impression continues to exist even in quarters usually the best informed on all matters appertaining to literature, we shall cull a paragraph from a letter addressed to the writer of these pages by D. Owen Maddyn, a few days previous to his lamented death.

"For private reasons I avoided knowing Lady Morgan; but critically I am acquainted with all her points. She had an immense amount of brass and brilliancy; and was a very striking person in her way, but I always recoiled from her as a sort of female Voltaire, reared in a province, and fed on potato diet. She did not appreciate the hereditary Puritanism of the Irish Protestants, among whom

Digitized by Google

she was born and bred, and she had no sympathy with the far descended traditional religion of the Catholics of Ireland. She scoffed and scorned, and ransacked the French *salons* in a wearisome way: but she had spirit, play of fancy, and as a novelist she pointed the way to Lever, whose precursor she was. The rattling vivacity of the Irish character; its ebullient spirit, and its wrathful eloquence of sentiment and language, she well pourtrayed; one can smell the potheen and turf smoke even in her pictures of a boudoir. Her attack on Croker was very clever, and had much effect in its day. It is written on the model of the Irish school of invective furnished by Flood and Grattan."

The great success of 'France' induced Mr. Colburn to offer Lady Morgan a very considerable sum for a similar work on Italy. But let us state the proposal, and the circumstances which led to it, in her own words. The "Odd Volume" of her recently published Diary opens with: "This morning, as I was on my knees, all dust and dowdyism, comes the English post—old Colburn—no! not old at all, but young enthusiastic Colburn in love with 'Florence Macarthy,' and a little *épris* with the author! 'Italy, by Lady Morgan!' he is 'not touched, but rapt,' and makes a dashing offer of two thousand pounds—to be printed in quarto like 'France'—but we are to start off 'immediately,' and I have 'immediately' answered him in the words of Silemo in 'Midas'—

> "'Done! strike hands—
> I take your offer,
> Further on I may fare worse.'"

From August, 1818, to May, 1819, we find Lady Morgan sojourning in London, Paris, and La Grange, in preparation for her journey to Italy. At the great

Digitized by Google

metropolis, Lady Morgan made the acquaintance of Lady Caroline Lamb, so famous for her mad adoration of Byron, her activity in personally canvassing the electors of Westminster on behalf of her brother-in-law, and for three light fashionable novels of which she was the author. "Glenarvon," Lady Caroline's best novel, pourtrayed the character and idiosyncrasies of Lord Byron, for whom she had contracted an unfortunate attachment. The noble poet, after some time, trifled with her feelings. She went into retirement, and continued to reside for several years at Brocket Hall, the seat of her husband, the Hon. William Lamb, afterwards Lord Melbourne. The peaceful seclusion which she had sought met with a painful and fatal interruption. When one day riding with Mr. Lamb near Brocket Hall, a hearse passed, conveying the remains of Byron to Newstead Abbey! Lady Caroline was carried home insensible, and an illness ensued, which eventually consigned her to the grave. The letters of this strange woman to Lady Morgan are amongst the best things in that "Odd Volume" of autobiography which the latter published in January, 1859. An idea of their originality may be formed from the following passage in a farewell letter to Lady Morgan: "You will probably see among the *dead* in some newspaper, 'Died on her voyage to Bonneberga Hague, Lady Caroline Lamb, of the disease called death, her time being come, and she being a predestinarian.'" The striking portrait of Byron executed for Lady Caroline by Sanderson, was bequeathed by its owner to the subject of these pages.

Another very remarkable female character with whom, as we gather from Lady Morgan's Diary, she associated closely during her *séjour* in London when *en route* for Italy, was the eccentric and accomplished lady of whom, as Miss Monckton,

Digitized by Google

Johnson and Miss Burney have left us some amusing details, but who in 1818 rejoiced in the high sounding title of Lady Cork and Orrery, and Viscountess Dungarvan and Kinalmeakey. As illustrative of the eccentricities of this personage, we cull a droll entry from Lady Morgan's Diary.

"Lady Cork's fading sight induced her to borrow eyes from every body who dropped in; I was frequently on service. One morning she said in her peculiar way, when I asked how she was, 'Well, child, of course I am well, but I want you to write me two notes. I am going to get rid of my page.' —'What! get rid of your pet!'—'Don't talk, child, but do as I ask you.' So I took up my pen, and wrote under her dictation, 'To the Duchess of Leeds. My dear Duchess, this will be presented to you by my little page, whom you admired so the other night. He is about to leave me; only fancy, he finds my house not religious enough for him! and that he can't get to church twice on Sundays. I certainly am not so good a Christian as your Grace, but as to the Sundays it is not true. But I think your situation would just suit him, if you are inclined to take him. Ever yours, M. Cork and O.'—'Now,' said she, 'fold that up, and put on the address, for fear of mistakes. Now my dear, begin another to your friend Lady Caroline Lamb, who, 'tis said, broke her page's head with a teapot the other day.'—'A Tory calumny,' said I; 'Lady Caroline was at Brocket the very day the adventure was said to have happened at Whitehall.'—'I dont care whether it's true or not,' said Lady Cork; 'all pages are better for having their heads sometimes broken; now write please: 'Dear Lady Caroline, will you come to me to-morrow evening, to my *Blue* party? I send this by that pretty little page whom you admired so, but

Digitized by Google

who, though full of talent and grace, is a little imp, whom perhaps, *you* may reform but I cannot. (*Par parenthèse* the page just described as a little saint was the 'little imp' I was now desired to *proner*.)—He is very like that boy you used to take into your opera box with you, and was so famous for dressing salad. I would not advise you to take him, if I did not think he would suit you. Ask any one you like to my blue soirée particularly Mr. Moore. Yours in all affection M. C. and O. 'Now my dear put that up, and good morning to you.'"

The signature of M. Cork and Orrery gave rise to an amusing équivoque. Having written an order to an upholsterer for some valuable article in his warehouse, she received for reply, "D. B. not having any dealings with M. Cork and Orrery begs to have a more explicit order, finding that the house is not known in the trade."

Lady Morgan pays a visit to the opera, which is lit up gaily, and for the first time, with gas. The fair portion of the auditory inveigh against it because it does not "become" the complexion so well as the spermaceti. At the opera, Lady Morgan sees the newly married Duchess of Clarence with "her yellow skin, lemon-coloured hair, pink eyes and sharp features." She also goes to Almack's and criticises there also. But we prefer to follow her to Paris, where she arrived early in 1819 while the angry intrigue to displace the Duke de Cazes from his office of first favourite and first minister was at its zenith. Denon and La Fayette were in waiting to receive the distinguished visitor. The great General carries her off almost by force to his grand château at La Grange, the picture of which as well as of La Fayette's very interesting family has all Lady Morgan's felicity and vividness of description.

Digitized by Google

La Fayette is very communicative and tells Miladi many curious anecdotes, for instance, how he once went to a *bal masqué* at the opera with Marie Antoinette upon his arm, the king knowing nothing of it, with other *morceaux* illustrative of the *esprit d'aventure* in vogue in those days at the Court of Versailles, and in the head of the haughty daughter of Austria.

After a most delightful sojourn at La Grange, passed in the society of the hero of two worlds, and of three revolutions, Lady Morgan goes back to Paris and meets Humboldt, aud Talma, and Cuvier, and Duchênois, who become constant guests at Miladi's salon, and perform with a *grace débonnaire* for her what they would hardly have done to oblige crowned heads. With Denon she renews an old and honorable intimacy. Auguste Thierry she notices and caresses as "a promising young *littérateur*." Carbonnel fascinates Sir Charles and Lady Morgan, but especially the latter, by his charming voice and passion for music; Auguste de Staël, Corinne's son, also figures at Miladi's receptions, and speaks English with the fluency of a native; we are also introduced to the Princess Jablonowski, "the only woman who was ever the intimate friend of Napoleon without being his mistress," Madame de Villetti, Voltaire's Belle et Bonne, who made Miladi a freemason, Baron Gérard, Jouy, Sismondi, Lacroix, De Ségur, Rochette, the vain and gifted d'Arlincourt, Constant, who praised her book on France so cordially, Dr. Portail,—all the prettiest women in short, and the brightest masculine minds of Paris flocked to the *salon* of our great authoress, and made it quite an intellectual Elysium.

Rossi, who was assassinated in 1848 at the door of the Chamber of Deputies in Rome, Lady Morgan met on two occasions at this period. He was in

1819, as Denon assures us, a universal favourite in society. Lady Morgan says in her Diary, "met Monsieur Rossi whom I did not like—the reason why I cannot tell." Again: "Rossi dropped in but I know not how it is his presence casts a chill." Lady Morgan in her work on Italy bitterly bemoans that she had failed to make the acquaintance of Madame de Staël. "I thus was prevented," she adds, "from seeing one of the most distinguished women of the age; from whose works I had received infinite pleasure, and (as a woman, I may add) infinite pride."

Lady Morgan did not always act the hostess. Her society was generally and eagerly sought after. Moore, in his Diary of October 17th, 1819, records: "went with Camac to see Sir Charles and Lady Morgan, her success every where astonishing. Camac was last night at the Countess Albany's (the Pretender's wife and Alfieri's) and saw Lady Morgan there in the seat of honour, quite the queen of the room. Capponi too, one of the great men of Florence, sent an order from Genoa to have apartments at the house of his *homme d'affaires* ready for her on her arrival there." Moore who suffered from illness at this period congratulated himself, in the same day's journal, that Sir C. Morgan should have been then in Paris—a circumstance which shews that Moore entertained a high opinion of Morgan's skill as a physician. On October 19th, 1819, Moore was sufficiently recovered to dine "with the Morgans" and to hold an animated philosophical argument with Miladi.

Byron, who had attacked Lady Morgan in one of his notes to Childe Harold, having heard from Moore that she was about to write a record of travels and observations made in Italy, laughed disdainfully at the idea. "I suspect I know a thing or two of

Digitized by Google

Italy," he adds, "more than Lady Morgan has picked up in her posting. What do Englishmen know of Italians beyond their museums and saloons and some hack * * *en passant?*" A perusal of the book warned Byron to be henceforth slow in judging without ample evidence. Writing to Murray on August 23rd, 1821, he observes, in answer to some charges of plagiarism: "Much is coincidence: for instance Lady Morgan (in a really *excellent* book, I assure you, on Italy) calls Venice an Ocean Rome. I have the same expression in Foscari, and yet *you* know that the play was written months ago, and sent to England; the 'Italy' I received only on the 16th inst." Writing to Moore, on the following day, Lord Byron goes on to say—"By the way, when you write to Lady Morgan, will you thank her for her handsome speeches in her book about *my* books? I do not know her address. Her work is fearless and excellent on the subject of Italy—pray tell her so—and I know the country. I wish she had fallen in with *me*. I could have told her a thing or two that would have confirmed her positions."

The principal public buildings in Italy were described by Lady Morgan with all that felicity of expression which, in matters that touch her heart and fancy, had ever been peculiarly her own. The Duomo of Milan, for example, which, although begun in the fourteenth century, was not finished until the nineteenth, by Buonaparte, is sketched with a pencil of light. The architecture, which is mixed Gothic, she leaves to the cavils of *virtuosi*, and describes it as she saw it, in the radiance of an Italian sun at mid-day. Its masses of white and polished marble, she tells us, are wrought into elegant filagree, hardly less elaborate than that which Hindoo fingers trace on Indian ivory; while its slim and delicate

Digitized by Google

pinnacles, tipped with sculptured saints, and looking (all gigantic as it is) like some fairy fabric of virgin silver, dazzles the eye, and fascinates the imagination. Its interior solemnity is represented as finely opposing its outward lustre, and the effect of the contrast as heightened by the splendid procession of the chapter in rich vestments, and the more affecting, though less imposing one, of the viaticum borne to some dying sinner, whilst the Imperial guard turned out and presented arms as it went forth, and those who were passing by, stopped and knelt with uncovered heads. The first Napoleon took a deep interest in the Duomo of Milan, and used to gaze with insatiable delight upon the splendid pinnacles which he had helped to raise.

At Rome, Lady Morgan had the honour of presentation to Pope Pius VII. From Cardinal Gonsalvi, his accomplished Secretary of State, she received much courtesy. Lady Morgan used to say, that among other kindnesses, he rescued her husband's books from a seizure made by the Holy Office.

A book of travel more amusing than "Italy" had not appeared for many a day. After galloping through the critical passages of the Alps, Lady Morgan enters upon Piedmont. She then sketches with a bright pencil her route through Lombardy, Genoa, Placenza, Parma, Modena, and Bologna, which concludes the first volume. The second comprehends her more interesting tour through Tuscany, Rome, Naples, and Venice; her chief guide would seem to have been Eustace's "Classical Tour." When we remember that the latter work, written by a zealous Catholic priest, gave offence in Italy, it can hardly surprise that Lady Morgan's book should have been in these days proscribed by the King of Sardinia, the Emperor of Austria, and the Pope; and, as

Digitized by Google

the authoress assures us in her Preface to "Salvator Rosa," "it became dangerous to receive letters, or to answer them."

It was Lady Morgan's fate through life to be obliged to contend, single-handed and almost unceasingly, against an organised assault of violent bludgeon criticism, which had its origin in private and political motives, and which, in the case of any other woman, would have utterly crushed her. This band of desperado critics found an ally in a minor tribe of scribes who with pen-stilettos dipped in poison, persecuted her virulently. No doubt the ablest and most influential of the former band was the late Right Hon. John Wilson Croker, whose voluminous contributions to the "Quarterly Review" constituted him a red Indian in critical literature. His memory, to adopt the language of Mr. Maddyn, "is buried beneath a pyramid of scalps," and there let it lie.

"Italy" was published on the 20th June, 1821, and by the twenty-third of that month, some of the journals hostile to liberal principles, had tried, judged, and condemned it; though one of the leading faults attributed to it was that it consisted of two huge quarto volumes. By the 1st of July it was reviewed by almost every ministerial print, newspaper, and magazine. The attack of the "Quarterly" upon this work was exceedingly, and most characteristically violent. Among other sweeping assertions, quite unsupported by proof, the reader is informed that "'Italy' is a series of offences against good morals, good politics, good sense, and good taste;" that "this woman is utterly incorrigible," and further, that, "her indelicacy, ignorance, vanity, and malignity," "exceed all credence," that, in short, "every page teems with errors of all kinds, from the most

Digitized by Google

disgusting down to the most ludicrous," and by way of excuse for not adducing proof, the Reviewer has the cool effrontery to assert, "extracts could afford no idea of the general and homogeneous stupidity which pervades the work." A more sparkling or original *raconteuse* than Lady Morgan never lived; yet the critic would fain persuade his readers of the reverse, and with consummate coolness he speaks of "the narcotic influence of her prating, prosing, and plagiarism." In the same breath that he censures some alleged coarseness of language on the part of Lady Morgan, he falls into the same error himself, and adds: "notwithstanding the obstetric skill of Sir Charles Morgan, (who we believe is a man-midwife) this book dropt all but still-born from the press." More Billingsgate was probably never stuffed into so small a compass. This unmanly attack occupies little more than four pages—a circumstance which exhibited the utter dearth of proof.

Among the many contemporary poetic squibs which exploded at Lady Morgan's expense, we are tempted to revive one so full of sparkling wit and cruel point, that a book such as ours, which professes to give a view of Lady Morgan's foes, as well as her friends, would, doubtless, be considered incomplete without it. It appeared anonymously; but the writer, now a very distinguished man, has avowed the authorship to us. It was written, he says, in college, during the first exuberance of his youthful genius. The reader will at once perceive that the poem is a parody on "Lochiel's Warning."

Sir Charles Morgan is made to exclaim:—

Glorvina! Glorvina, beware of the day
When the "Quarterly" meets thee in battle array!

Digitized by Google

For thy volumes, all damned, rush unread on my sight,
Glorvina! Glorvina, ah! think ere you write!
See! see! where the witty and wise about town
Are struggling, who foremost, shall trample thee down!
Proud Giffard before hath insulted the slain!
And Croker, in spleen, may pursue thee again!
Weep Lady! thy prospects are faded—undone—
Oh, weep! but thy tears only add to this fun!
For their black ink is poison—a dagger their pen,
And the book they once stab, may not waken again.

To all this croaking about Croker, Glorvina replies:—

Go preach to thy patients, thou death-telling seer,
Or if Giffard and Croker so dreadful appear,
Go, crouch from the war, like a recreant knight,
Or, draw my silk shawl o'er thy organs of sight!

The knight continues to express his gloomy forebodings, warns Glorvina that the dirge of her glory is sung, and conjures her to return all lonely to her dwelling.

Glor. False wizard, avaunt! I have marshalled my clan,
Their pens are a thousand—there genius is one!
They mock thy prescriptions! they laugh at thy breath,
Go! preach to thy patients of danger and death!
Then welcome be Croker—his smile or his frown,
And welcome be Crawley—we'll trample them down!
Their colour shall vary from yellow to blue,
Like the colour of Constable's famous Review!
When my heroes impassioned for victory strain,
Sir Richard the learned! and Ensor the vain!
All active, all armed, in their author's array!
Sir C. Glorvina, Glorvina beware of the day!
'Twas my studies in youth gave me mystical lore,
And the womb of the Future, in fear I explore!
Time trembles in pain, as his pulses I feel,
But fate must be known tho' I may not reveal!
I tell thee that London with laughter will ring,
When the blood-hounds of MURRAY at FLORENCE shall spring!
Ho! COLBURN! arouse thee, arouse thee with speed,
And arm thy gazette, 'tis a moment of need,
Ho! Maga! green Maga! awaken each sprite!
Raise—raise your oak-crutches to cover her flight!

Digitized by Google

Oh! would that thy book went to sleep of itself,
Like pamphlets unbound on a dust covered shelf;
But mourn! for a darker departure is near—
The wise shall condemn, and the witty shall sneer!
And she, that fair Lady whose home is the Lake,
With sworded Sir Arthur, thy doom shall partake,
In vain shall she combat for Morgan Le Fay.
Glor. Down, soothless insulter, I scorn what you say!
What ages of rapture roll fair to my sight!
What glories to come swim before me in light!—
Behold through the curtains of fate as I look,
O'DONNEL! and flirting with young LALLA ROOKH,
With BERTRAM is waltzing GLORVINA the fair!
And IDA is wrestling with LADY CLANCARE!
Near Apostate HEMEYA see IMOGEN'S face!
Oh never a ball such a galliard did grace!
In the beauty of fame they return to my sight,
Be they saved—be they damned—I will write—I will write!

If "Italy" was ridiculed by superficial critics at home, it received cordial commendation abroad from men, of all others, most competent to judge it. The following letter from the Baron Denon proves this.

"Chère et aimable Amie,

"Monsieur Tennant, qui part pour l'Irlande, veut bien se charger de cette lettre, qui au moins vous sera sûrement remise, et par laquelle vous saurez que nous vous aimons, que nous vous désirons, que nous nous occupons de vous, et en parlons tous les jours.

"Qu'est ce que vous faites, chère amie? Nous n'en savons rien de tout, et nous nous en inquiétons dans votre intérêt comme dans la nôtre. Votre dernier ouvrage est toujours le plus beau: votre 'Italie' a une force masculine, qui a conservée toute la grâce de son origine. Je voudrais bien dans ce moment avoir votre riche facilité. Toutes les gravures de mon ouvrage sont faites. J'écris mais cela ne m'amuse pas autant; il est si difficile d'écrire sur l'art, quand il ne faut se livrer qu'à l'imagination

Digitized by Google

des autres, et se garder de celle qu'on aimeroit à avoir. Voilà ou je suis en ce moment: c'est vous cependant qui êtes cause de tout cela! Je voudrais bien en être, à vous en avoir obligation, et n'avoir plus qu'à vous expédier les colossales volumes.

"Je désire bien vivement de quelque manière que ce puisse être, vous les remettre en main propre et vous remercier de les avoir fait. Si cela n'est pas encore fini, c'est encore votre faute: vous avez envoyé l'Europe dans mon cabinet, et il faut bien que je sois là, à son secours pour vous justifier, de ce que vous avez dit de lui.

"Embrassez notre cher, cher Chevalier, mais pour moi tout seul; je ne pardonne la distraction qu'à lui. J'ai votre portrait fort bien gravé, que j'ai mis en bonne compagnie; si vous en avez un du Chevalier, vous me ferez un grand plaisir de me l'envoyer.

"Adieu, chère et aimable amie; quand vous trouverez une occasion, écrivez moi deux mots sans le contact de la poste; car ce moyen est de toute nullité entre nous.

"Permettez moi de vous embrasser de toute la tendresse de l'amitié la plus vraie, et la mieux sentie.

"Denon.

"Lady Morgan,
"Kildare Street, Dublin."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

A long chapter in which Lady Morgan presents her Critics with a Rowland for an Oliver.—Thomas Campbell.—The Critical Chronomastix.—William Jerdan.—The "Quarterly."—Gibbets *galore*.—Colburn's letter.—"The British Critic."—Cyrus Redding.—Shoals of Slanderers and Snakes in the Grass.—Attempt to deprive Sir C. Morgan of his Knighthood.—Apathy of Jeffrey.—"Life of Salvator Rosa" published.—"Absenteeism." —Writings and Character of Sir C. Morgan.—Receptions in Kildare Street.—Maturin.—Sir J. B——'s rebuff.—Curry's retort.—A Masquerade.—Lady Morgan in the snow.—Dublin Castle.—"The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys."—Lady Morgan the immediate cause of the birth of the "Athenæum."—Prince Pucklar Moskau.—Lady Morgan's lines on the Ladies Paget.—Her second book on France.—Correspondence.—Lady Morgan pensioned.—"Book of the Boudoir."—"The Princess."—Mrs. S. C. Hall.—Lady Morgan changes her residence to London.

THERE appeared almost simultaneously with "Italy" another spirited and caustic, but, in the estimation of her friends, a somewhat injudicious retaliation by Lady Morgan upon her reviewers, under which they very keenly winced. To our thinking, however, it was the happiest and boldest effort of Lady Morgan's pen, and her friends have every reason to be proud of it. With a firm nerve, and a dauntless heart, she stood the brunt and returned the shaft which had been hurled at her fame and name.

This spirited document was gratuitously prefixed by Colburn to the "New Monthly Magazine" for

Digitized by Google

October, 1821. Colburn printed it uniform with the Magazine, but paged it separately. In the "Times" of the day, we find the following curious letter from Thomas Campbell:—"It is known to many persons that I am editor of 'The New Monthly Magazine; or, Literary Journal;' it is known to all with whom I have conversed on the subject, that I wish this work to be a receptacle for calm discussion and liberal opinions, but not an arena of literary hostility. I make it no vehicle of personal attack, and therefore I claim a right to keep it free from the din of even defensive personality. For any exceptions to this rule that may seem to occur, I hold myself bound to give an explanation to the public, provided the articles containing such exceptions have been submitted to me as Editor; but if any paper should find its way into the 'Magazine,' without having been shewn to me, I will not be responsible for its contents. Now Lady Morgan's letter in 'The New Monthly Magazine,' published to-day, was never seen by me till published, although, to ninety-nine readers out of one hundred, it will seem to be the leading article of the number. I am not Lady Morgan's accuser, but I decline being involved in the squabble between her and her enemies. She may be very right, and they may be very wrong; but whether she is in the right or in the wrong, her letter to her Reviewers was never submitted to me as Editor of the work which I am known to conduct, and the proprietors of that work are alone the publishers of her letter."

"It is now," said Lady Morgan, "twelve or fourteen years since the supposed literary organ of government gave the word to all subaltern scribes to bear down upon and attack whatever I should print. They have attacked me in every point where the

Digitized by Google

woman was most susceptible, the author most sensitive. They have attacked my public profession, and private character, my person, my principles, my country, my friends, my kindred, even my dress. They have done everything to injure—but praise me; for, after all, 'It is their slaver kills, and not their bite.' Hitherto, I have been, for the interests perhaps of truth and of literature, something too loth 'to stir at these indignities.' Even now, if I come forth among my nameless assailants, 'I swear by yea and nay,' or any other pretty oath, 'tis more in fun than fear—less in spite than sport. The shafts they have long let fly at me, and all that is dearest to me, have been shot from masked batteries, and 'dipped in double venom.' The arrow with which I returned their assault, will fall poisonless, though not perhaps pointless. Mine, I trust, will be true lady's archery, fair, though irregular; my aim taken in the garish eye of day—my name announced—my cognizance blazoned—my device known—and my heart worn, as it always has been, 'On my sleeve, for (even) daws to peck at.' Thus simply armed and frankly avowed, unmasked, unshielded but by truth, alone in the midst of my ambushed foes, I take my ground; 'And as I truly fight, so help me Heaven.' The accidental circumstance of being born and educated in a land stamped with the impress of six centuries of degradation—the natural tendency of a female temperament to a prompt, uncalculating sympathy—and the influence of that stirring quality called indignation (as often a constitutional as a moral affection)—gave a direction to my feelings, and a colour to my mind and writings, which from my 'youth upwards' have remained unchanged and indelible.

"Ireland, the country of my birth and my com-

Digitized by Google

miseration, became, almost in childhood, my inspiration and my theme; and with little reading, less judgment, but not one interested view, (for when was youth sordid?) I embraced the cause of the Irish Catholics, of whom, *personally*, I knew not one."

From Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, "Italy" received little mercy. *Maga*, of that day, was conducted on principles very different from those which now guide it. The hostile language to which it often gave expression, occasionally rose to a pitch of intemperance which baffle all description. It more than once led to bloodshed; and the sad fate of John Scott is too well known. Lady Morgan grappled with her potent foe, and retaliated in this wise: "The Edinburgh Magazine! Land of the learned and the liberal, land of the Humes, the Robertsons, the Playfairs, and the Leslies, can you suffer the time-honoured name of your lettered capital to be prefixed to such a thing as this? But nations, like Heaven, must sometimes submit to hear themselves profaned, and to have their venerated names taken in vain for the worst of purposes, and in the worst of causes, and now 'worse doom brave gallants.' Trot him out here on his pasteboard hobby, this lord of literary misrule—this critical chronomastix of the Edinburgh Magazine." This jaw-breaker, we may observe, was bestowed by Giffard on the herd of libellists who infested the times of Ben Jonson. Lady Morgan proceeded in the strain we have indicated, and left her foes in no very enviable plight. Mr. Jerdan's influential literary organ she spoke of as "floundering, and flouncing in the shallows of its own eternal dullness." This stroke of satire was provoked by Jerdan having declared that on finishing the first volume of "Italy," the "reader will have

Digitized by Google

learned little about the Italian cities; and nothing at all about the manners and customs of the inhabitants," and further, that "the reader will have found amusement and instruction in scarcely one of Lady Morgan's pages." The critic in the same breath, pronounced Byron to be no original poet, and that he ought not to be read! All her literary foes were gibbetted. "I would shew you off," she wrote, "as showmen exhibit apes, not for their beauty or utility, but for the malignant ingenuity of their foul and mischievous tricks."

But it was in the Edinburgh Magazine that Lady Morgan chiefly fleshed her sword. She was justly indignant at being called an "ambulating scribbler of bad novels, inditing two goodly quartos, every page of which, almost, is sprinkled over with more or less of nonsense, ignorance, indecency, irreligion, Jacobinism, and premeditated perversion of facts. "We have toiled," it went on to say, "through blasphemy and Jacobinism, calumny and falsehood;" the authoress was "a petticoated ultra Radical author," and her book "a monstrous literary abortion."

"But this is nothing," wrote Lady Morgan, "he has invented sentiments for me, expressive of the most shameless libertinism which ever disgraced any work, male or female." And Lady Morgan stooped to prove in detail the utter falsity of the charges so unscrupulously heaped upon her. "I appeal," she wrote, "from this false witness, to the readers of 'Italy,'" and again "alas! am I to incur the odium of indecency?—the worst a woman can sustain, the last she would choose to bear!" Having convicted her critics of many shameful distortions, she added, "this is the way I have always been reviewed, the object being *coute qui coute* to stop the sale of my works, and prevent my writing at all."

Digitized by Google

The weapon, however, which had been raised to cut off the sale of her books, not only fell impotently, but recoiled upon the arm of the wielder. In reply to the attack of the "Quarterly," which endeavoured to prove that "Italy" had no manner of sale, Mr. Colburn published a letter in the "Times" dated November 24th 1821. Having convicted the Reviewer of various critical expedients more ingenious than ingenuous, Mr. Colburn spiritedly concluded thus: "When he has the effrontery to assert, that the Travels were announced before the journey was commenced;—that the price of the work paid the expences of the tour;—that he has not heard of any voluntary reader, who has been able to get through the first volume;—that the work dropt still-born from the press;—that the public do not care about the book; and that the public will not buy it. Who believes him? and what opinion must the thousands of buyers and readers of the work form of this Editor and his Review? But to shew, in the most satisfactory manner, the inefficacy of such attempts to crush a most interesting writer, I am ready to prove, that five hundred copies of this work were sold on the first day of publication; that more copies have been disposed of during the last month, and since the appearance of the 'Quarterly Review,' than in any preceding one since the day of publication; that a new edition is in preparation; that two editions, amounting to 4000 copies, have been printed at Paris, and another in Belgium: and, as a further testimony to the value of Lady Morgan's writings, I seize the present opportunity of publicly declaring my entire satisfaction at the result of the undertaking; and that I shall be most happy to receive from the author another work of equal interest, on the same terms."

Digitized by Google

The price paid by Mr. Colburn for "Italy" was considerable. We catch a glimpse of its extent in the following anti-critic diatribe. "It is to the support of that public I owe it, that in spite of the shoals and shallows, which have impeded my literary course, I have still been enabled to keep my little bark afloat. Pirates, and privateers, weekly, monthly, and quarterly, with their letters of marque from high protecting powers, have opened their broadsides, and played off their small arms in vain. Public opinion was still my pilot; and, towed safely into port by its assistance, I have never yet been run a-ground. The price given for my last ventu[illegible] from Italy, a price 'Enough to bear a royal merchant down,' is the best answer to those who have endeavoured to undervalue the cargo."

Lady Morgan fought the ground inch by inch. The most paltry criticisms she stooped to strangle. Her reviewer, in analysing the style of "Italy," said "we meet with Europe subjugated (enslaved) to slavery." But replied Lady Morgan, "according to my Irish bog Latin, 'subjugated' from its derivation, means literally 'passed under the yoke!' It is related that the Romans did so upon an occasion

"'Patience perforce with wilful choler meeting;'

but they were not therefore enslaved. The Reviewer is referred to any Roman History abridged for the use of young ladies."

Lady Morgan's peroration was fine. "And now my Lord of literary Misrule I dismiss you! You may back your hobby, and retire from the lists; grateful for the distinction which has been accorded you in being thus pre-eminently held up to public derision, as best representing the corps to which you belong.

Digitized by Google

"'Away!—wretched Impostor!
Self-loving Braggart! ....
.... Scorn of all the Muses!
Go revel with thy ignorant admirers;
Let worthy names alone.'

"For you, Messrs. Constable and Co., whose names appear prefixed to a work, to which the Tonsons and the Dodsleys would scarcely have lent theirs, I call upon you for your thanks. It is not improbable, that your Literary Miscellany, but for me, might have been confined to the admiration of the tea-table coteries of obscure villages, or the subscription reading-rooms of provincial towns; or those still lesser but pretending circles, of 'benign ceruleans,' who put up with 'the cheap and dirty' of second rate monthly critical Reviews! But now I prefix the prize-article of your Magazine to the front of volumes destined to circulate through Europe, through America and to reach all British colonies wherever British enterprise has placed them. My French publisher shall affix your 'Review on Italy,' done into the dialect of Les Halles, to the second Edition of his translation; and thus, preserved, your Magazine may be quoted by future and foreign literati, as a curious specimen of the low state to which criticism and periodical publication were brought in Great Britain by 'Party spirit,' in the beginning of the 19th century; and, still more, it may serve as a proof of the contempt in which such works were held by contemporary writers—even by one whom they most reviled, and that one—a Woman."

The "British Critic," than a journal of considerable authority, but which, has since been gathered to its editorial fathers, attacked Lady Morgan with singular asperity and coarseness. "The 'British

Digitized by Google

Critic'" remarked Lady Morgan, "is edited by a clergyman; its contributors are clergymen, and its readers are said to be exclusively clergymen! From such 'spirits pure,' much might have been expected, and whatever, in their opinions, were my manifold sins, still I might have hoped more from their Christian mildness, than from the uncharitable severity of my laical judges. To their pages belonged a tone of evangelical reproof—a pious effort to lead the sinner to repentance! a fair summary of errors, and a gentle exhortation to recant them." Lady Morgan having quoted from "The British Critic" an unseemly paragraph in which the phrase "matrimonial animal" was used, she replied "that it seemed a rather light expression to apply to that 'honorable estate which signifies unto us, the mystical union between Christ and his Church.'" Alluding to a pedantic phrase of the "Critic," she went on to say: "This 'synthetical' *début*, of the Reverend reviewer, is only intended as an attack—not on my book—but on my attachment to my husband, on the coincidence of our opinions, and the unity of our sentiments, which his Reverence, in a tone of what he thinks 'right pleasant' irony, terms an happy 'androgynous organization'—'a beautiful accord of intellectual hermaphroditism!" For 'a man and wife' not to live 'like cat and dog' may be a palpable innovation (in the Reverend's opinion), a symptom of radical reform, and a vile attack upon the social system!—it may be a state which he and (to use his own phrase) his 'conjugal yoke-fellow' may never have endured;—but surely, whatever may have been his own private sentiments on the subject, it is hardly accordant with the sanctimonious gravity of that 'church and state' breviary, 'The British Critic,' to make married happiness

Digitized by Google

and unity the subject of a sustained and 'right pleasant' ridicule, through two whole pages and a half."

At a further stage of her argument, she observed that those grave and deliberate falsifications of an author's text might be part of the church polity: "If this be the case, the interests of social order are at stake, and the author sacrificed (like the victim of former times) may writhe, but cannot resist under the knife of the High Priest, who performs the rites of immolation." Lady Morgan fought "The British Critic" with great acumen and calmness. In the conflict she never forgot the lady, or assumed the amazon. She showered her sparks of diamond wit before her swinish adversary. An idea of the dirt in which he grovelled may be inferred from the following elegant quotation with which Lady Morgan's reverend Reviewer summed up her character.

> "Herewith she spew'd out of her FILTHY MAW
> A flood of poison, horrible and black:
> Her VOMIT full of books and papers was."

Lady Morgan was of opinion that the general interests of literature have been rather injured than benefitted by the prevalence and influence of periodical Reviews. Even the best and first of such publications have been accused of national partialities, of personal predilections, cliquery, and of being subjected to the influence and interests of the publisher for whom they are edited; while with respect to the whole corps of professional critics, Lady Morgan considered that their works have tended to check the free play of public judgment by forestalling its decisions, and in pretending to guide public taste only enfeebled it. Lady Morgan cannot be regarded as a disinterested authority on the subject; but be this

Digitized by Google

as it may, she repeatedly scorned the pretensions of critics, and denied their right to throw literary opinion into leading strings. "By imposing commentaries," she said, "and scanty analyses, they have saved the indolent the trouble of reading, and the shallow the pains of thinking; they have supplied dogmatizing pretension with a tempting assortment of ready cut-and-dried decisions upon works unknown to it in the original; and thus furnished it with the means of giving the law in society, from whence those more highly gifted with original views and independent judgments withdraw in disgust, if not in intimidation. It is also from the multiplicity of periodical reviews of every calibre, and of every price, that the sphere of blue-stocking coterie-ship has been extended, and that literary discussion, in more enlightened circles, has been placed under the ban of ridicule; for all fear to share that 'dread laugh' raised against those Messieurs Trissotins, who prey on the pages of periodical publications, as silk-worms feed on less noxious leaves, and spin out again the light nutriment they have imbibed, until the flimsy fragile web, though it catch none but gad-flies, usurps and supplies the place of stuff of nobler texture, and more sterling material."

The furtherance of the cause of Catholic Emancipation was the generous motive which led to all the national tales of Lady Morgan; and it was doubtless the transparency of the object, and the influence of the means, which enkindled the wrath of most of her foes. Her works having been translated into several continental languages, the disabilities under which Ireland laboured were thus published throughout the civilized world.

It will be remembered that the letter from Thomas Campbell, written in his capacity of editor of the

Digitized by Google

"New Monthly," contained a few passages somewhat slighting in their tone towards Lady Morgan. The following paragraph from the pen of Cyrus Redding, Campbell's friend and colleague on the "New Monthly Magazine," is not without interest. It is extracted from "Fifty Years Recollections," v. iii. p. 215. "I cannot avoid mentioning Lady Morgan, although I do not profess to make mention of living contemporaries. I do Lady Morgan feeble justice in recording her warm-heartedness, her eminent talent, her love of country, and sense of independance. I have nothing to retract after thirty-four years acquaintance, except my own apparent neglect in her regard, justified by absence and causes which I need not state. The fidelity of Lady Morgan to nature's truth, in her pictures of existing life, the advocacy she has ever displayed for what is just and generous, and the sympathy every honourable mind must feel in respect to the splenetic attacks made upon her, by unmanly writers, are obvious things. Lady Morgan could well afford to pay the usual penalty of talent. She drew with a correct pencil the wrongs of her country, and laboured to inculcate on its enemies correct principles for its government."

As Reviews, political and literary in France and England, had not been found sufficiently influential in suppressing the writings of Lady Morgan, whole volumes of animadversion were got up by the ultras of both countries. One was published by a gallant colonel, "Who," as she observed in noticing the circumstance, "introduced himself at my house in Dublin (having no other mode of making my acquaintance) where he was hospitably entertained, and presented to many persons of rank and fashion. A few weeks after appeared his book written against my 'France.' When he read to me the complimentary passages in

Digitized by Google

the opening of his MS., I little guessed the virulence which was to be displayed in its subsequent pages." A person undertook to translate "France" into the vernacular language of that country, but it was done so falsely that Lady Morgan found herself compelled to protest against it in the French journals. The same hand also brought out a garbled translation of "Florence M'Carthy" in opposition to one done, as her Ladyship said, "*under her own eye*" whereupon her hypercritical assailants exclaimed, "Which eye?" Damaging criticisms and biographies of Lady Morgan were also written by two ladies of notorious character whom she refused to visit. Mr. Playfair published a work entitled "France, *not* the France of Lady Morgan," and against Italy there appeared a ponderous pamphlet said to be the production of a military officer, holding distinguished appointments under the British government. In the title to this book, Lady Morgan was accused, in large capitals, of "Calumnies and Misrepresentations." Throughout the work, the writer seemed to regard a difference of political opinion as a sufficient cause for placing his opponent beyond the pale of human courtesies. His very title page, as applied to a subject on which two honest opinions might be held, and prefixed to a work which contradicted no material fact that could have come within Lady Morgan's cognizance, if not in itself a "calumny and misrepresentation," was at least a discourtesy which came with an ill grace from one whose very first charge against the authoress is a want of courtesy to Lord Bentinck. "For the private and personal character of Lord Bentinck," said Lady Morgan, "I have the greatest respect, and I should be most sincerely grieved, if in the heat of discussion, I had penned a single word that would hurt his feelings."

With the exception of Mr. Croker, and some of

Digitized by Google

the smaller fry of critics who echoed his voice and views, Lady Morgan never made a private enemy by the many satirical and singularly happy sketches of real life and men, of which she was the author. "No writer in our opinion," observes the 'Illustrated London News,' "ever hit off the Lords and Ladies of the Almacks of that day with a vein of humour happier; and it is no slight proof of the fair and impartial generalisation with which she chose her characters, and of the inoffensive though piquant style of her portraiture, that the caricatures in which so many of their best friends might have recognised some of their traits never were received as personalities, never were known to give offence, never diminished by one member the happy circle which loved to crowd round the gifted artist."

The malignity with which the band of desperado critics pursued this brilliant woman knew not where to stop. In January, 1822, the influence of some high Tories so far prevailed, that the opinion of the notorious Orange Attorney-General, Saurin, with that of his colleague, the Solicitor-General, were taken whether the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland had any power to confer the honour of knighthood; and both gave it as their decided opinion, that since the Union no such right has existed. The object is said, whether rightly or wrongly, to have been the dethronement of Ladies Morgan and Clarke. A copy of the opinion was sent to Lord Wellesley, as announced in the "Gentleman's Magazine" of the day; but the question, it would seem, fell into abeyance. Among those whose honours were declared to be null and void by the law officers of the crown in 1822, were Sir Arthur Clarke, (brother-in-law to Lady Morgan) Sir Edward Stanley, Sir Thomas Whelan, Sir Charles Morgan, Sir John

Digitized by Google

Stevenson (Moore's colleague,) Sir Thomas Moriarty, and Sir William Betham. The latter, however, was a staunch Conservative: and if the design of the Tories were really to bring the Morgans and Clarkes to the dust, some friends must necessarily have perished in the wreck.

It is, we think, hardly creditable to the late Lord Jeffrey, who professed to conduct the "Edinburgh Review" on thoroughly liberal principles, that he should not have made some effort to sustain our authoress against the truculent attacks of its critical rival and political foe, the "Quarterly." Yet Jeffrey held his peace. The contemptuous silence which he observed towards Lady Morgan, was if possible more damaging than the censure which no one knew how to wield with more telling effect. At length in July, 1824, the "Edinburgh Review" broke silence on the subject; and the very first allusion to our authoress, under her maiden or married name, which found expression in the great Whig Review, occurs in an exceedingly acrimonious critique, on her "Life of Salvator Rosa." This, if not as complete as it might be, is surely a very fascinating art-biography.

A contemporary satire on Lady Morgan, called "Glorvina's Warning" notices with complaisance the unworthy hostility of the "Edinburgh Review."

> "Let her fly from the anger of Jeffrey's sure eye,
> Ah! home let her speed—for the havoc is nigh!"

The next glimpse which the readers of the "Edinburgh Review" obtain of Lady Morgan is in the year 1825, when her "Absenteeism" apparently furnishes the critic with a theme. But the paper is a mere statistical disquisition on absentees; and the name of Lady Morgan is mentioned once only, and that

Digitized by Google

with neither praise or censure. For many years after no further notice is taken by the "Edinburgh Review" of the labours of Lady Morgan.

The reason which induced Lady Morgan to select the life of Salvator Rosa in preference to that of other, perhaps more illustrious, Italian Painters was the peculiar character of the man, rather than the extraordinary merits of the artist. But though enthusiastically admiring the works of this great Neapolitan master, she estimated still more highly the qualities of the Italian Patriot who stood in the foreground of times not the most forward or tolerant, and in the teeth of persecution openly and fearlessly declared his sentiments. Rosa possessed a powerful intellect, bound by strong philosophical sinews, much deep feeling, with a wild and gloomy imagination, which came forth even in his most petulent sketches and careless designs. Lady Morgan having found during her Italian researches that Salvator Rosa's life had been greatly misrepresented, and strongly denounced, undertook the somewhat Quixotic task of combating these strictures, and in doing so, she obtained no thanks from the Roman Catholic party, and much abuse from the Conservatives.

In this, as in other works which preceded it, Lady Morgan expressed sentiments which, however creditable as strongly favouring liberty, were perhaps more or less open to objection in consequence of the intemperate language which sometimes clothed them. "The strong national enthusiasm of childhood," observes Mr. H. F. Chorley, a friend of Lady Morgan, "at once somewhat indiscriminate in its warmth and limited in its scope, will be seen to have ended in fearless and decided political partisanship, in the espousing of ultra liberal doctrines, abroad as well as at home." But let us hear Lady Morgan's vindi-

Digitized by Google

cation. "For myself at least," she writes in her Preface to the last edition of O'Donnel, "born and dwelling in Ireland amidst my countrymen and their sufferings, I saw, and I described, I felt, and I pleaded; and if a political bias was ultimately taken, it originated in the natural condition of things, and not in 'malice aforethought' of the writer. The same womanly sympathies have governed my writings and directed my views for other countries; and I have never denounced a public wrong which has not come home to my own feelings through the spectacle of private suffering. In this, the proprieties of the sex cannot fairly be considered as compromised; and if the first step towards observation be to feel, and the second only to think, the female temperament cannot be so adverse to the perception of the higher moral truths as has been vulgarly and plausibly pretended. From the rack and the faggot of the middle ages, to the penal laws of Ireland, and the *carcere duro* of modern Austria, there are sources of the deepest of all human interests, and details of the wildest romance, beyond all that the most fertile imagination can devise, or fictitious narrative present. These are mines for the novelist to explore; and should they yield likewise lessons of practical wisdom, adapted to the awakening intelligence of the people of the great European republic, the circumstance is surely no derogation from their fitness for his purpose."

"Absenteeism," which was published by Colburn in 1825, and met with a large sale, had previously appeared in detached papers through the medium of the "New Monthly Magazine." Written with that flowing energetic eloquence which characterised all the productions of the Irish de Staël, the work bears ample testimony of her love of fatherland, deep re-

Digitized by Google

search, extensive reading, play of fancy, and piquancy of satire. The peculiar bent of Lady Morgan's mind, however, inevitably imparted a picturesque turn to her ideas, and induced her to view the subject less as an economist, than as a poet and a woman. To this graceful performance, Sir Charles Morgan contributed a soundly studied and elegantly written Preface.

In her exertions to promote Catholic enfranchisement, Lady Morgan found in Sir Charles a zealous and most efficient ally. During the five and twenty years which this gifted and amiable man spent in Ireland, he devoted a considerable portion of his time, talents, and means to furthering the Catholic cause. Like the ancestors of the Geraldines, he soon became more Irish than the Irish themselves. He advocated the cause of the people and their religion not only in the public journals, but in the reviews and periodicals of the time: he loved civil and religious liberty with enthusiastic ardour, and his house, both in Dublin and London, was always open to sufferers in that great cause from whatever land they came.

Sir Charles Morgan was an able and researchful, as well as an eloquent writer. He soon became very favorably known for the light and sparkling style in which he conveyed valuable truths combined with curious fancies. That the knight's prestige was not purely local is evidenced by the fact that his "Philosophy of Life" and "Philosophy of Morals" were translated into French by the Count de Tracy, an eminent metaphysician, and into Italian by another hand equally competent. To Lady Morgan's books of travel in France and Italy, Sir Charles contributed the chapters on law, medical science, and statistics. But his views on religion were unfortunately not as orthodox

Digitized by Google

as might be desired. His sentiments had a decided tendency to materialism, and some of his metaphysical interpolations in the writings of Lady Morgan, drew her into not a few difficulties.

His disposition, however, was thoroughly amiable and endearing. Mr. Staunton, one of the oldest Irish friends of Sir Charles, writes: "He was in every way a most interesting and estimable person. Everybody heard of his talents and accomplishments, but no person who did not know him long and intimately could sufficiently appreciate the suavity of his manners; the kindness of his heart, the warmth and steadiness of his attachments, his universal philanthrophy; his hatred of every species of wrong doing, and his thorough devotedness to the cause of civil and religious liberty in all climes, and under all circumstances. He was one of the most agreeable acquaintances in the world—always in good humour, unaffected, kind, considerate, sympathising and hospitable. In all the relations of life he was exemplary." Cyrus Redding, speaking of Sir C. Morgan, says that "he was one of the most truthful men he ever met."

A writer has advanced the opinion that Sir Charles was of humble and impoverished extraction. Nothing can be more erroneous. Lady Morgan refers in her Diary to her husband's aunt, "a wealthy old lady *de province*, who has more than once turned the scale of an election, and who boasts of her illustrious race as being descended from Morgan the buccaneer, and sister to the brave General Morgan in India." The old lady seems to have been a decidedly strong-minded woman. A gang of burglars having broken into her house she went alone to see what was the matter, and having found a fellow getting out at the window, she caught him by the

Digitized by Google

leg, and held him until she examined every feature of his face so as to be able to swear to him. Her friends advised her not to prosecute lest the gang should avenge it, but she exclaimed, "Justice is justice, and the villain *shall* be hanged."

The house occupied by Sir Charles and Lady Morgan during their long sojourn in Ireland, was No. 35, Kildare Street, opposite the great aristocratic Club which takes its name from that thoroughfare. It is a long and showy house exteriorly; but not possessing any back rooms, the imposing appearance of size which it presents to the passer-by is, in a great degree, deceptive. The small portico which still shelters the hall-door was erected by the Morgans.

In this agreeably situated mansion there was regularly held for a long series of years, a still more voluminous series of most delightful and select literary réunions, which are remembered by the surviving favoured few who had the privilege of access, with enthusiastic feelings of pride and pleasure. A constant guest was the brilliant, eccentric, and almost forgotten Charles Robert Maturin. Domestic sorrows and pecuniary reverses threw a gloom over the latter years of his existence; and, as a contemporary record informs us, every inducement failed to make him desert his melancholy hearth save the intellectual circle which Lady Morgan illuminated by her sparkling wit, or the romantic solitudes of Wicklow wherein some of his richest veins of inspiration had been caught in happier bygone days. Among those who figured at Lady Morgan's conversazioni were Sheil, Curran, Lords Cloncurry, Charlemont, Dunsany, and Miltown, Hamilton Rowan, Thomas Moore, General Cockburn, Edward Moore, Judge Fletcher, North, Finlay, Kirwan the chemist, Pro-

Digitized by Google

fessor Radichi T.C.D., Chief-Baron Woulfe, Staunton, Berwick, Corry, and the accomplished kinswomen of the hostess, Lady and the Misses Clarke. The rising artistic talent of Ireland received constant attention from Lady Morgan. Comerford, Mulrennin, and Lover were constant guests. Kirwan, to whom we have alluded, was a man of eccentric and methodical habits. In declining one of Lady Morgan's invitations he urged, as an excuse, that it was not shaving day.

Lady Morgan occasionally wore a patronising air which was not at all times agreeable to the persons brought in contact with her. The following little anecdote proves this. P— only went once or twice to the evening receptions at Kildare Street, and departed with the impression that he would rather not repeat the visit. Lady Morgan asked L— to try and persuade P— to come; but L— was obliged to tell her that his friend was a man of peculiar temperament, and preferred to remain away.

Like Moore—whom she resembled in more ways than one, in size and elastic constitution of mind—her weakness consisted in a too strong desire for aristocratic society; but unlike him she ruled in the circle where she moved. She was also excessively fond of securing "Lions." When Sir J— B— visited Dublin previous to undertaking his onerous duties in C——; Lady Morgan invited him to come and take tea with her. "My stay and time is limited," he replied, "but if it is merely to take a quiet cup *tête-à-tête* with yourself, I shall have very great pleasure." The stipulation was agreed to, and an evening named; but a day or two after, the Lion received a note to the following effect. "Dear Sir John—Do not forget the cup of tea and me. You need not fear that I will have any gaping folk to

Digitized by Google

stare and bore you—I have asked none but noblemen of high rank, with whom you cannot fail to feel at home and pleasant." "I was so vexed," observed Sir J— B—, as he told the anecdote, "that I immediately wrote to say that during the limited period of my stay in Dublin, I wished to spend my time in the society of intellectual people from whom I might get some useful information, and that I feared it would not be in my power to join her ladyship's titled friends on that evening."

It rarely happened, however, that Lady Morgan's receptions were exclusively composed of coroneted folk. Her evening meetings at 35, Kildare Street, rendered it, for many years, a complete centre of Opinion in Dublin, and were not without influence in promoting the Catholic cause. Here the Catholic leaders invariably learned the latest and most authentic news of Cabinet thoughts, divisions, and difficulties. Lady Morgan maintained a correspondence with some of the most influential political personages; and the substance of their letters frequently oozed out, and shaped the course of the democratic leaders accordingly. In Mr. Torrens M'Cullagh's Life of Sheil we have some illustrations of this fact. For instance, "It happened that one evening at the house of Lady Morgan, a letter from Mr. Hyde Villiers to his brother (the present Earl of Clarendon), then Commissioner of Customs in Dublin, was shewn to Mr. Woulfe. It presented anew the considerations stated by Lord Anglesey; and coming from one who was believed to be aware of the feelings and sentiments of the government, it carried no little weight. The contents of the letter were communicated to Mr. Sheil, who invited a second party to meet at dinner the following evening."

A poetical squib of the day casually refers in so

Digitized by Google

humorous a way to these evening receptions of "Miladi," as Denon and La Fayette called her, that we are tempted to jot down the entire stanza from memory.

> "Och Dublin City there is no doubtin',
>   Bates every city upon the say;
> 'Tis there you'd hear O'Connell spoutin',
>   An' Lady Morgan makin' tay;
> For 'tis the capital o' the finest Nation,
>   Wid charmin' pisantry upon a fruitful sod,
> Fightin' like divils for conciliation,
>   An' hatin' each other for the love of God."

The rapidity and power with which Lady Morgan wielded pithy but playful argument, attracted some wonder, and not a little admiration. Seated on her little throne, she has frequently given battle to a dozen expert logicians at the same moment.

Apropos of her conversational contests, there is an amusing anecdote related of Mr. Curry, who, in a spirited discussion with her Ladyship at length got the worst of it. Our authoress, exaggerating the fashion of the day, wore little, or indeed we might say, no sleeves whatever to her dress; and a mere strap over her shoulders supported it. Curry was walking away from her coterie, when she called out, "Ah! come back, Mr. Curry, and acknowledge that you are fairly beaten." "At any rate," said he turning round, "I have this consolation, you can't laugh at me in your sleeve." The portrait prefixed to the last edition of "The Wild Irish Girl," furnishes an idea of Lady Morgan's style of wearing apparel thirty years ago.

The great secret of Lady Morgan's remarkable longevity, unflagging spirits, and unfading memory to the last, was doubtless traceable to the care with which, from her earliest days of authorcraft, she ab-

Digitized by Google

stained from overtasking the brain, or making a toil of a pleasure. She never wrote to exhaustion, or drained the cup of inspiration to the dregs. For each hour of hard labour she took two for relaxation; and in every accessible bit of frolic and festivity she participated with hearty raciness and *abandon*. For instance, at the gay fancy ball given in Dublin by the Lady Mayoress in 1818, (a newspaper report of which lies before us) Lady Morgan is announced as supporting "with her wonted vivacity and talent" the part of a French Flower Girl. Sir Charles Morgan sustains the character of a French Peasant, Sir Arthur Clarke that of an old Grandmamma, Lord Cloncurry a Friar, General Cockburn, Sir Peter Teazle; "Two superb and tasteful dominos," Lords Charlemont and Caulfield; a Bogwood Man, Mr. Burrowes, and "the Merry Wives of Windsor," Mesdames Crampton and Bushe. A few weeks afterwards, Mrs. Putland gave a fancy ball at which, says the paper of the day, "Ladies Morgan and Clarke with Sir Arthur Clarke, as a fiddler, supported the character of Ballad Singers with great spirit."

Lady Morgan was probably induced as much by a sense of duty, as by inclination, to participate in every accessible source of gaiety and excitement in Dublin. For how could she be reasonably expected to depict scenes with accuracy of which she had not ocular demonstration and experience? "Whether," it has been justly observed by a contemporary critic, "whether it is a review of volunteers in the Phœnix Park, or a party at the Castle, a masquerade, a meeting of United Irishmen, a riot at the Dublin Theatre, or a pig-day at Bog Moy—in every change of scene and situation our authoress wields the pen of a ready writer." The volunteer review in the Phœnix Park under the auspices of the Duke of Belvoir

Digitized by Google

(Rutland) to which Lady Morgan's critic alludes as a graphic sketch may be found in the third chapter of "The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys." Another prime secret of Lady Morgan's good health and long life, was the regular walking exercise which, in all weathers, she daily performed. Round Leinster Lawn, recently so much altered by the fine edifices on each side, it was the daily custom of Lady Morgan to walk before dinner for two hours or more. The winter season of 1826 was one of great severity. Snow, many feet deep, filled the streets; the pavement was a glacier; and every roof sent down its avalanche to the risk of the unthinking heads which entrusted themselves within its reach. Industry stood petrified; the poor perished; hospitality closed its door, and diners-out began to fear that they should not even dine at home. An occasional sledge rattled over the crisp and crackling snow, while street urchins skated along the congealed gutter, and pelted snow-balls freely. The sensible folk, in their own estimation, preferred the fireside to the iceberg; and notwithstanding the pangs of dispepsia, remained hermetically encased in rugs and *fauteuils*. Lady Morgan in a "Fragment of a Journal" writes: "Among the first to break through this quarantine was myself. Occupying an old-fashioned house, in a dull, old-fashioned street, (which owes its distinction to the former residence of the illustrious family of Ireland's only duke) I was tempted to take advantage of its vicinity to Leinster Lawn, (the garden of the ex-palace of the Geraldines), in search of fresh air and blood-stirring exercise. Muffled in furs and plunged in snow boots, I was floundering through its white and untracked space, when two black spots at the further extremity of the grounds, near the gate which opens to the privileged who hold its

Digitized by Google

key in Merrion Square, caught my attention." They grew in size as Lady Morgan approached, and what she at first took for two crows, proved on closer inspection, to be two lovely children of the higher ranks of life, standing knee-deep in snow, each endeavouring to support the other. Their noses were blue, their lips swollen, and their tears congealed as they fell. Lady Morgan released them from their jeopardy, rubbed their little limbs, and wiped their bleared cheeks. A very long dialogue follows which would seem out of place to transfer to these pages. The anecdote shews the singular courage with which Lady Morgan in the severest weather, allowed no obstacle to deter her from regular daily exercise. It may well be supposed that these walks gave her a generous appetite. A distinguished literary character writes, with an apology for committing to paper so uninteresting a topic: "Her memory should also be respected for her attention to the culinary art—in the words of a learned French writer—'that first of all arts which procures us the most frequent and most durable enjoyment.' In her continental tours she did not overlook the important knowledge for which Archestratus visited foreign lands in the most famous days of Athens. This gustative and intellectual Greek, the friend of the sons of Pericles, travelled only with a view to the pleasures of the palate, embodying the varied information he collected in his poem "Gastronomia"—the standard authority on points of taste, among the epicures of Athens. Lady Morgan, in like manner, profited by her visits to foreign climes, to bring home the best culinary receipts, copied in the original languages, in a book specially devoted to the purpose—which volume (far more interesting than the Sybelline) she used every day to consult, doing into English for that important

Digitized by Google

functionary, her cook, such portions of its contents as were to be realised for her epicurean guests at dinner."

At the viceregal drawing-rooms of the Marquis and Marchioness Wellesley, Lady Morgan frequently figured. "Here it was," writes one who participated in the Castle festivities, "Here it was that I saw Lady Morgan for the first time; and as I had long pictured her to my imagination as a sylphlike person, nothing could equal my astonishment when the celebrated authoress, in *propria persona*, stood before me. She certainly formed a strange figure in the midst of that dazzling scene of beauty and splendour. Every female present wore feathers and trains; but Lady Morgan scorned both appendages. Hardly more than four feet high, with a spine not quite straight, slightly uneven shoulders and eyes, Lady Morgan glided about in a close cropped wig, bound by a fillet or solid band of gold, her large face all animation, and with a witty word for everybody. I afterwards saw her in the dress circle at the theatre. She was cheered enthusiastically. Her dress was different from the former occasion, but not less original. A red Celtic cloak, formed exactly on the plan of Grainneuille's, fastened by a rich gold fibula, or Irish Tara brooch, imparted to her little ladyship a gorgeous and withal a picturesque appearance, which antecedent associations considerably strengthened."

Our correspondent speaks of the unevenness of Lady Morgan's eyes. Though not perfectly straight, however, they were remarkably large, beautifully blue, lustrous, and electrical.

"The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys" an Irish novel in four volumes, was published by Colburn, in November, 1827, and as Lady Morgan espoused the

Digitized by Google

cause of the oppressed people of Ireland with renewed ardour in this book, while mercilessly lashing the ascendancy party, it may well be supposed that the sluices of Tory invective were promptly let loose upon her. Although the Jesuits received some keen strokes of satire from the pen of Lady Morgan in "The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys" the work may be said to have had for its object the Civil Emancipation of Irish Catholicism. Never were labours more thoroughly disinterested.

"In again presenting an Irish novel to the public," wrote Lady Morgan, "I hope I am not doing a foolish thing: and yet I feel, that as far as my own interests are concerned, I am not doing a wise one. To live in Ireland, and to write for it, is to live and write *poignard sur gorge*; for there is no country where it is less possible to be useful with impunity, or where the penalty on patriotism is levied with a more tyrannous exaction. Called, however, to the ground by the sarcasm of enemies, and by the counsels of friends, I venture forth once more, with something less perhaps of intrepidity, than when I 'fleshed my maiden sword' under the banners of 'The Wild Irish Girl;' but in the full force of that true female quality, over which time holds no jurisdiction—perseverance.

"I anticipate upon this, as upon similar occasions, that I shall be accused of unfeminine presumption in 'meddling with politics;' but while so many of my countrywomen 'meddle' with subjects of much higher importance:—while missionary misses and proselyting peereeses affect to 'stand instead of God, amongst the children of men,' may not I be permitted, under the influence of merely human sympathies, to interest myself for human wrongs; to preach in my way on the 'evil that hath come upon my

Digitized by Google

people,' and to 'fight with gentle words, till time brings friends,' in that cause, which made Esther eloquent, and Judith brave? For love of country is of no sex. It was by female patriotism that the Jews attacked their tyrants, and 'broke down their stateliness by the hands of a woman;' and who (said their enemies,) 'would despise a nation which had amongst them such women?'"

In reviving a paragraph from this long forgotten Preface we are enabled to protect Lady Morgan's memory from an imputation that has often been cast upon it. We shall say nothing of the cavils of sundry ephemeral critics, but there is one statement in a work of standard authority which certainly demands a protest. Speaking of Lady Morgan's Irish novels, Chambers' "Cyclopedia of English Literature," (v. ii. 581) says: "One complaint against these Irish sketches was their personality, the authoress indicating that some of her portraits at the Viceregal Court, and these moving in the 'best society' of Dublin, were intended for well known characters." But Lady Morgan, it seems, went out of her way to declare the contrary and to prevent the possibility of misconception. "The personages introduced on the scene," she observes in her Preface to 'The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys,' "are those which belong to the times described. They are alike necessary to the *vraisemblance* of the story, and to the fidelity of the portrait: and 'I beseech, very heartily, at my desire, my requests, and my petitions,' the zealots of party spirit, and the purveyors of private scandal, to refrain from the application of my characters to their own purposes; and from the fabrication of false 'keys,' by which their petty larceny has heretofore attempted to rob me of the little merit of that 'fearlessness' with which I have

Digitized by Google

held the mirror up to nature, without subterfuge and without evasion. May I be permitted here to observe, that with the exception of those public characters, whose delineation was almost a plagiarism, and whose peculiarities arose out of the political state of Ireland, and were necessary to the display of its story, I have drawn none but such as represent a class, or identify a genus. Even my Ladies Llamberis and Dunore were illustrations, not individuals. They were intended to represent the spoiled children of high society in all ages, from the charming Duchess de Maine, with her inimitable *il n'y a que moi qui ai toujours raison,* to the modern mistresses of supreme *bon ton,*—all alike the creatures of circumstances the most unfavourable to moral consistency. However, I may have fallen *à main basse* on popes and potentates,—taken the field against Austria, to 'hang a calf's skin on those recreant limbs,' and put forth my protocol against the Holy Alliance, I have held private life sacred, and have religiously abstained from bringing forward a single anecdote or circumstance incidental to the life of any private individual. The only 'key,' therefore, that I acknowledge, is that which is to be found in the great repository of human nature. *Au reste,* I grieve, that in self-defence, I must wound the self-love of those 'walking ladies and gentlemen,' who affect to tremble lest 'Lady Morgan should put them into her book,'—by dropping into their 'unwilling ears' the secret that *tout bois n'est pas bon à faire Mercure.* Like Macbeth, 'I cannot strike at wretched kernes;' and not even for the benefit of a puffing 'key' would I transfer to 'my book' the obscure insignificance and flippant pretension that bore and worry me in society. I also take the opportunity of averting the wrath of half the fair *bureaucratie* of Ireland, roused by my

Digitized by Google

palpable hit at a certain red velvet gown, in Florence M'Carthy (for of the genuine aristocracy of rank or wit, I have no cause to complain,) by informing those whom it may concern, that the said red velvet gown belonged to a person, with whom I had every right to take every liberty—even to the libellous extent of 'putting her into my book,' when, where, and how I pleased,—that is, to myself."

"The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys," although professedly a fiction, was really a work of some historical importance, and may be safely consulted in many of the details by statistic or historic writers. We learn, for instance, from Moore's Diary (vii. 192) that General Corbet assured Moore that the account of his escape from Kilmainham, as given by Lady Morgan in this novel, was remarkably accurate in the leading particulars. The foot notes contained many rich, and but little known *morceaux* of Irish history. There are some tastes which the style of the work may not please, but with its political aim no critic, however cavilling, could well quarrel. "The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys," contains, we fear, a few coarse expressions; and in common with its predecessors, exhibits a somewhat inconsistent love for republicanism and aristocracy.

Lady Morgan assures us that if she drew a coarse picture it was with a view to illustrate happily extinct manners, and to shew the great progress which has been made in refinement since. The epoch which she selected for illustration had been hitherto untouched, and possessed deep interest in a national point of view as embracing events which prepared the Rebellion and accomplished the Union. An epoch of transition between the ancient despotism of brute force, and the dawning reign of public opinion, it was characterized by the supremacy of an oligarchy, in whom the sense of irresponsible power had en-

Digitized by Google

gendered a contempt for private morals, as fatal as their own political venality.

"The portraiture of such an epoch," she writes, "is curious from its evanescence, and consolatory by comparison with the present times,—times the most fatal to faction, and favourable to the establishment of equal rights, which Ireland has yet witnessed. It may also serve as a warning to a large and influential portion of the public, which has yet to learn, that to advocate arbitrary government, is to nourish moral disorder. In the ranks of intolerance, are to be found many who make the largest pretensions to purity of principle, and to propriety of conduct. Should any such deign to trace in the following pages, a picture of manners, far below the prevalent tone of refinement now assumed as the standard of good company, it may diminish their confidence in their favourite political maxims, to remark, that all which has been thus gained for society, has been obtained by a progressive abandonment of the system they advocate."

The great O novel, as they called it, was not received with much favour by the English reviews; and on one severe critique in the "Literary Gazette" a most important event in the annals of modern literature hinged. Lady Morgan's new novel having been noticed with strong animadversion by that Journal (which had for many years previously wielded potent influence in the world of letters, and as a weekly critical organ enjoyed a thorough monopoly) her publisher, Mr. Colburn, took great offence at it, and in conjunction with the late James Silk Buckingham, he started the "Athenæum." Mr. Orme, in a private letter to William Jerdan, the then Editor of the "Literary Gazette," speaks of this "very indiscreet article," and adds: "In confidence allow

Digitized by Google

me to state to you, that overtures have been made to the house respecting a weekly literary journal by one of the first publishing and carrying houses in the trade, who, in conjunction with others of equal power, have determined to support such a paper, being careful that it is conducted with ability, discretion, and impartiality."

Mr. Jerdan can hardly be said to have been in a position to judge Lady Morgan's performances with a dispassionate and unprejudiced eye. That gentleman was very severely handled by Lady Morgan in her "Letter to the Reviewers of Italy." "I confess," he writes in his 'Autobiography,' "never to have admired aught of Lady Morgan but her talents; and I fancy there was no love lost between us; for I remember at one of poor dear Lady Stepney's soirées that innocent being caught occasion to introduce Lady Morgan and myself formally to each other. I had a laugh in my sleeve, and I afterwards heard through the kind communicativeness of the female coterie, that her Ladyship signified her wonder at the idea of presenting that odious man to Her!"

Jerdan's review of "The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys" was exceedingly sarcastic and condemnatory. "Two or three years ago," said the 'Literary Gazette,' "when we happened to dissent from Lady Morgan on some literary estimate, she published a replication in which she elegantly threatened to '*stir us up with a long pole.*' We have read the 'O'Briens and the O'Flahertys,' and we are convinced, by its length, that it is the identical pole which was then menaced." After cautioning the females of England against reading this book, Mr. Jerdan adds: "we grieve that such a picture should have come from the pen of a woman." "The libel, too, is wrought up with congenial spirit." "In all our reading we never

Digitized by Google

met with a description which tended so thoroughly to lower the feminine character." "Mrs. Behn and Mrs. Centlivre, it is true, might be more unguarded; but the gauze veil cannot hide the deformities—and Lady Morgan's taste has not been of efficient power to filter into cleanliness the original pollution of her infected fountain."

To the simple accident of this caustic attack upon Lady Morgan, the birth of that mighty literary censor, the "Athenæum," may be directly traced. While under the incubus of James Silk Buckingham, the "Athenæum" did not make much progress, nor did the labours of John Stirling, who succeeded him as editor, tend much to stimulate it; but from the hour that this Journal passed into the hands of Wentworth Dilke, it became almost by magic a powerful and profitable literary engine. It perhaps laboured under one disadvantage during the editorial régime of Mr. Dilke. Dilke, although an able writer of fragmentary papers, never succeeded in writing a book; and authors who received a severe castigation at his hands were not slow in retorting that this "peevishness" arose from his own failure in authorcraft. "His milk of human kindness," said one, "the thunder of failure has turned into vinegar." At length, the accession of Hepworth Dixon, an author of merit and importance, to the censorial throne of the "Athenæum," rescued it from the vapid taunt of which we have spoken.

Her Ladyship's next lucubration was the "Book of the Boudoir," a series of autobiographical sketches, and recollections of her friends. This work displays the wonted energy and sparkle of Lady Morgan's style. Like all autobiographical performances it had the fault of being a little egotistical. A long dialogue with Robert Owen, the famous Utopian Philanthropist, is characteristic and interesting.

Digitized by Google

In 1828, O'Connell paid a graceful tribute to the national feelings and achievements of Lady Morgan. "To Irish female talent and patriotism we owe much," he said: "There is one name consecrated by a generous devotion to the best interests of Ireland—a name sacred to the cause of liberty, and of everything great, virtuous, and patriotic—the name of an illustrious female who has suffered unmanly persecution for her talented, and chivalrous adherence to her native land. Need he say that he alluded to Lady Morgan. Her name is received with enthusiasm by the people of that country where her writings create and perpetuate among the youth of both sexes a patriotic ardour in the cause of everything that is noble and dignified." Considering her great popularity in Ireland, it is indeed no wonder that Lady Morgan should so long have preferred "Dear Dirty Dublin," as she herself called it, to a splendid house in Regent Street, which the late Mr. Colburn offered her rent free.

Before the year 1828 terminated, Emancipation became certain. On the motion of Richard Lalor Sheil, the Catholic Association, after enduring, under various forms, from 1760, was formally, finally, and perpetually dissolved. Sir Charles Morgan had been a zealous member of this body, and accompanied by his patriotic wife, assisted at the interesting ceremony of its dissolution. In her last Preface to "The Wild Irish Girl," Lady Morgan speaks of the Catholic Association as "that greatest league of genius, patriotism, and courage, that Ireland ever had associated in her cause."

The "Quarterly Review," when under the editorial management of Mr. Lockhart, noticed, very trenchantly, a growing error in biographical composition. It remarked that such a favorable colour was usually

Digitized by Google

spread over the picture that its fidelity must be rather worse than dubious. Everything unfavorable was omitted, "and upon the whole," added the 'Quarterly,' "we feel corroborated in our doubts, whether the very best of this species of biography can be considered in any other light than a romance of real life —a picture of which the principal figure must be considerably flattered, and everything else sacrificed to its prominence and effect."

We, at least, have endeavoured to keep clear of the error which the great critical organ of England has indicated, and while protecting the memory of Lady Morgan from the shafts of calumny, we have not hesitated to give attention to every honest expression of opinion on both sides. No picture is perfect without lights and shadows. A brilliant portrait deprived of shade, would be fit only for the lumber-room. Impressed with the truth of this remark, we shall make a few transcriptions from the note-book of Prince Puckler Moskau, who made a tour through England and Ireland in 1828:—"I was very eager," says the distinguished stranger, "to make the acquaintance of a woman whom I rate so highly as an authoress. I found her, however, very different from what I had pictured her to myself. She is a little frivolous, lively woman, apparently between thirty and forty, neither pretty nor ugly, but by no means disposed to resign all claims to the former, and with really fine and expressive eyes. She has no idea of *mauvaise honte*, or embarrassment; her manners affect the *aisance* and levity of the fashionable world, which, however, do not sit calmly or naturally upon her. She has the English weakness, that of talking incessantly of fashionable acquaintances, and trying to pass for very *recherchée* to a degree, quite unworthy of a woman of such distinguished talents."

Digitized by Google

The German Prince adds, that Lady Morgan in conversation was often very biting and sarcastic, of which there cannot be, indeed, the slightest doubt.

John Wilson Croker, ever on the watch to give a cut to Lady Morgan, observed, in reviewing the Prince's book, that "She was an established authoress six-and-twenty years ago, and that if, according to the Prince's calculation, she was then only eight or nine years of age, she was such a juvenile prodigy, as would be quite as worthy to fill a shew waggon at Bartholomew Fair, as her ladyship's namesake, who was born with double joints, and could lift a sack of corn with her teeth when she was only six years old." Lady Morgan, on a closer acquaintance, would seem to have improved in the estimation of Prince Puckler, for in the Diary of a subsequent day, he tells us, "I spent a very pleasant evening to-day at Lady Morgan's. The company was small but amusing, and enlivened by the presence of two very pretty friends of our hostess who sang in the best Italian style, [the Misses Clarke]. I talked a great deal with Lady Morgan on various subjects, and she has talent and feeling enough always to excite a lively interest in her conversation. On the whole, I think I did not say enough in her favour in my former letter. The conversation fell upon her works, and she asked me how I liked her 'Salvator Rosa.' 'I have not read it,' replied I, 'because I liked your fictions so much, that I did not choose to read anything historical, from the pen of the most imaginative of romance writers.' 'O, that is only a romance,' said she, 'you may read it without any qualm of conscience. Ah,' said she, 'believe me, it is only *ennui* that sets my pen in motion; our destiny in this world is such a wretched one, that I try to forget it in writing.'"

Digitized by Google

In 1825, the Marquis of Anglesey declared in the House of Lords, that the clamours of the Catholic Association ought to be met, not by concession, but my powder and ball; and in a furious speech which did him little credit, he expressed his willingness to charge the disaffected Irish at the head of his hussars. To this speech he owed his nomination to the Viceroyalty of Ireland, by the Administration of 1828. But the Marquis had no sooner arrived in Ireland, than he saw the necessity for Catholic Emancipation, and for a letter which he addressed to Primate Curtis, urging the Catholics not to abate one doit in their agitation, the Marquis was recalled. From the moment that his views assumed a liberal complexion, the Tory press began to vilify him as fluently as it had previously belauded him with fulsome panegyric; and not content with assailing his public character, they professed to have discovered that the Marchioness of Anglesey had been indiscreetly conducted in private some thirty or forty years before. In "Blackwood" of the day, then a rampant Tory organ, it is mentioned in an article headed "Ireland in 1829," that Lady Morgan "glittered and fluttered the gayest among the gay in Lady Anglesey's Court, and was positively sentimental in declaiming against the prudery and hypocrisy of those who refused to follow her example."

A more brilliant Court had not been held in Dublin Castle since the Richmond régime. The accomplished family of Lord Anglesey possessed many rivetting attractions. The Marquis, himself a venerable relic of Waterloo, was an object of no ordinary interest. The grace and beauty of his three youngest daughters excited general admiration. Lady Morgan wrote the following impromptu upon them which is now published for the first time.

Digitized by Google

THE GRACES IN IRELAND.

Of old Olympus' Court grown weary,
  Bored with dowdy Gods and Goddesses,
Where all was grand, and dull and dreary,
  Big wigs—brocades, and stiff-laced boddices.

It chanced, the Graces on a day
  Resolved a *trip* to earth they'd try,
And just for fun—once in a way—
  To *cut* their own *eternal* sky.

But where to wing their brilliant flight
  They sat for half an age debating,
When on their doubts to throw a light,
  Enter, the Aide-de-Camp in waiting.

Momus, the merriest God in heaven,
  If not the sagest—said in short—
"Were I from old Olympus driven
  I'd choose, i'faith ! the Irish Court.

"For tho' there's dignified urbanity,
  Supreme bon-ton, and State in plenty:
Still, all so smacks of sweet humanity,
  I'd choose that Court—aye out of twenty."

"But how present ourselves, dear Momus ?
  A Court, is still a Court, we trow,
Were it as free as that of Comus
  One must go label'd there you know."

"*Label'd !* I like that ! shew your faces,
  Of a reception there you're sure,
Besides, I know against the *Graces*
  L'estrange will never shut the door."

"Still we must have a name—'tis clear."
  "A name ! *I'll* give you one at once,
Take that which Erin holds most dear,
  Say you're 'The Pagets'—for the nonce."

Away they flew—the God had reason,
  The Graces had a *grand succès*,
Passed for the Pagets for a season,
  Then back to heaven re-winged their way.

Digitized by Google

The signal success which had attended the publication of "France," induced Sir Charles and Lady Morgan early in 1829, to pay a second visit to that great country, and to write another book upon it. The vast and exciting changes which had gathered in the interval around the destiny of France, tempted to action the graphic and speculative pen of Lady Morgan.

This second book on an old theme appeared in June, 1830, and at once became an authority. It was dedicated to Lafayette, "by his friend and servant, the author." The work chiefly comprised a picture of the state of society in France—a condition in part the result of Lafayette's own great example, and national influence.

"Having left Ireland," writes Lady Morgan, "in the dark moment which preceded the bright rising of her great political day,—after lingering there, till hope delayed had made the heart sick,—we went abroad in search of sensations of a more gracious nature than those presented by the condition of society at home. It matters not whether any preconceived intentions of authorship influenced the journey; a second work on France can be alone justified, by the novelty of its matter, or by the merit of its execution. It may serve, however, as an excuse, and an authentication of the attempt, that I was called to the task by some of the most influential organs of public opinion, in that great country. They relied upon my impartiality; (for I had proved it at the expense of proscription abroad, and persecution at home) and, desiring only to be represented as they are, they deemed even my humble talents not wholly inadequate to an enterprise whose first requisite was the honesty that tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the

Digitized by Google

truth. This I have done to the full extent of my own convictions, and to the utmost limit of the sphere of my observation: I answer for no more."

On Lady Morgan's return to Dublin, she at once resumed those brilliant, gay, and hospitable evening receptions, which during her absence, had been so sadly missed. On August 27, 1830, Moore, as mentioned in his Diary, dined at Lady Morgan's. Curran and Sheil, North and Edward Moore, with Lady Clarke, and her daughters, were present. Lady Morgan's fund of anecdote and drollery was, as usual, inexhaustible. As a specimen, Moore jots down, "Lady Morgan's story of her telling Lady Cork, on the morning of one of her assemblies, that she had just seen Sir A. Carlisle, who had been directing and preserving the little female dwarf, Crachami. 'Would it do for a *Lion* for to-night?' asked Lady Cork. 'Why, I think hardly.' 'But surely it would if it's in *spirits*.' Their posting off to Sir A. Carlisle's, and Lady C. asking the servant for the little child. 'There's no child here, ma'am.' 'But I mean the child in the bottle.' 'Oh! this is not the place where we bottle the children—that's at master's workshop.' In talking of Irish pronunciation, Lord Gort saying in court, when some one was called forth, 'He's in *jeel*.' A lady, in describing the situation of her house, 'We've the *bee* in our rare.'"

Moore's Memoirs of Lord Byron were published about this time. It may be remembered that the noble bard, in one of his letters, praised Lady Morgan's "Italy." The following communication addressed to the Irish journalist Staunton, speaks for itself:—

[Private.]

Dear Sir—The enclosed has just been sent to me

Digitized by Google

extracted from Byron's Life by a dear friend of his. I should be obliged by your giving it with the other extracts in your paper. I know it requires no small share of courage, *moral and physical*, to quote *a single line in favour* of ONE *marked* out in this wretched country by *proscription*, by THAT party to whose cause *her life*, and all its best *prospects have been sacrificed*. I beg, therefore, if you have any apprehension on the subject that you will return the enclosed. I am, Dear Sir, &c.,

SYDNEY MORGAN.

The seal on this letter displays the Irish harp with other national and characteristic devices. The extract to which she alludes may be found, *ante*, p. 212.

On the accession of the Grey Ministry to power, with King William the Fourth, November 22nd, 1830, they conferred, among other minor but just and judicious acts of patronage, a pension of £300 on Lady Morgan, professedly "in acknowledgment of the services rendered by her to the world of letters," but in reality as a just compensation for the sacrifices she had made to liberal principles, as well as for the uninterrupted stream of slander which John Wilson Croker and his Tory colleagues had long brought to play upon her reputation. This act of Lord Grey was not only a graceful one, but may be said to have marked an epoch in the History of Letters. No pension had been assigned to a female writer until Lord Grey performed this kind office for Lady Morgan, and Sir Robert Peel had offered a similar compliment to Mrs. Somerville, an authoress who, we need hardly remind the reader, expounded La Place to the English scientific student as Madame de Chatelet had expounded Newton to the French. The Grey Ministry did more. Sir Charles Morgan

Digitized by Google

was appointed one of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries: and the reports on this subject, of which several appeared from his pen, are remarkable for their perspicuity and cleverness.

We are enabled to state on the most conclusive authority that the annuity presented to Lady Morgan was alike unasked and unexpected. The veteran authoress received the boon gratefully. "Due honour," she said, "to the men who took the initiative in directing the spiritual nature of woman to intellectual pursuit by the encouragement of public distinction—who thus fostered those mental faculties by which the humanity of either sex is best improved and forwarded, and by which the greatest scheme of the creation—motherhood—can alone be brought to its ultimate perfection." And referring to the only infirmity of age which tormented her, she said, "Even blindness is arrested in its dark course by the repose permitted to eyes which have worked out an humble but laborious vocation, ordained alike by nature and necessity."

Soon after the Revolution in Belgium, Lady Morgan made a tour through that country, and embodied in a new novel the result of her observation, as well as many exciting incidents of the recent Revolution in the Netherlands. This work was published under the title of "The Princess." Although the scene of the story was laid far away from "the land of the Pats and Potaytees," several racy Irish characters, including Laurence Fegan, and Sir Ignatius Dogherty, trod the stage of this highly dramatic picture. Of this book, viewed morally, it may be said that the aim is faithful to the great object of Lady Morgan's life.

We once heard an eminent author inveigh against a brother scribe who had trod in a similar walk of

Digitized by Google

literature. "Hang the fellow," he said, "years ago I took my stand on that field into which he has now intruded. I am sure I have toiled enough to make it my own. Physicians never interfere with each other's patients, and the same feeling of etiquette ought to guide the conduct of authors. Why didn't the fellow kill a Hessian for himself? What business has he making love to my wife?" From this feeling of jealousy, so usual among authors, Lady Morgan was strikingly exempt. Lady Morgan's mantle may be said to have fallen to the gifted Irish authoress, Mrs. S. C. Hall:* and it is a remarkable fact that when this amiable lady first came before the public, Sir Charles and Lady Morgan, who then had the almost entire editorial control of a very influential magazine, did their best to encourage and applaud her. "They were ever ready to foster young talent"—writes Mrs. Hall, "and we call to mind, with gratitude, her generous criticism on the works of an author, whom a less generous nature would have noted as poaching on what she might have considered her own Irish preserve."

The late D. O. Maddyn considered Lever to be an imitator of Lady Morgan. So far from feeling any professional jealousy, Lady Morgan most cordially fanned the flame of Lever's genius and ambition. In her last Preface to 'The Wild Irish Girl,' she pronounces the "true Irish humour of Mr. Lever to be as racy as it is genuine." Banim, Griffin, Crofton Croker, Grattan, and Maxwell, also received her cordial eulogy. "I would exchange any one of my Paddies with Mr. Carleton for his Paddy-go-Easy," she writes, "and the exquisite literary historical essays of Davis, who was intensely national,

* When Mrs. Hall read this passage she exclaimed, "No! her mantle must be her shroud."

Digitized by Google

without ceasing to be universal, and combined all that is brightest in true Irish genius. He had a southern imagination, and northern judgment, but he died before he came to his fame." Of Miss Edgeworth her great literary rival and contemporary, Lady Morgan refers as the author of some "useful, admirable, and most humourous" works. There never was a writer less free from literary jealousy than Lady Morgan.

In every movement, tending to national amelioration, Lady Morgan participated with almost masculine spirit and activity. At the meetings held at this period in Dublin, with a view to promote Irish manufacture, we find her name constantly appearing. Probably the best speeches delivered were those by A. Carew O'Dwyer Esq., then in the fullness of his brilliant parliamentary reputation. Lady Morgan, however, was no indiscriminate supporter of Irish liberal movements. She always cordially aided the Catholic question; but she never believed in the practicability of Repeal. Referring to the condition of her humbler fellow-countrymen early in the present century, and sarcastically alluding to certain minor demagogues of a later period, who greatly exaggerated O'Connell's system of political agitation, she said: "their keen sense of suffering was not then sharpened by the rhetoric of personal vindictiveness, nor their strong energies wasted on the pursuit of an unattainable object."

Lady Morgan, during the earlier career of the "Athenæum," contributed occasionally to its columns. In 1838 appeared a short series of papers from her pen, entitled "Historic Sites." The light poetical pieces—"Fun and Philosophy"—in the "Athenæum" of the previous year were furnished by Lady Clarke.

Digitized by Google

In 1839 Lady Morgan changed her home from Kildare Street, Dublin, to William Street, Hyde Park, London; but this change in no degree changed the veteran authoress's habits. Here, as in Ireland, her evening *conversazioni* continued uninterrupted. The brightest and newest literary talent, with the soundest liberal opinion, flourished around her throne. "There is many a wit," says Charles Mackay, "statesman, scholar, and man of science, who would as soon omit to answer the muster call of one of Lady Morgan's pleasant réunions, as in the good old days of French society, Voltaires, and La Rochefoucaults would have thought of deserting the *ruelle* of the Hotel de Rambouillet or the Carnevalet." Lady Morgan's panegyrist might have added, "legal magnate" to his sketch of the class of company who so long frequented her gay boudoir, Lord Campbell being an invariable guest.

For leaving Ireland after she had received a pension for her patriotism, Lady Morgan was subjected to many a sarcastic remark. But the same taunt might as justly be levelled at Curran. Lady Morgan defended herself by saying, that the political views she entertained would in Dublin have confined her to one phase of society, while in London she could choose from all. In ceasing to reside in Ireland, however, she did not cease to be an Irishwoman in heart and soul. Her old friends, and her new ones, together with numbers of her younger countrymen who, armed with letters of introduction, perpetually made descents on that cheerful little boudoir in William Street, were always received with a hearty *cead mille failthe*.

Touching the well-used and thread-bare taunt of Absenteeism against Lady Morgan, she wittily observed in August, 1846, that her property in Ireland

Digitized by Google

was "personal" not "real," and that the tenant-farm of a drawing-room balcony, worked for the raising annual crops of mignonette for home-consumption, was the only "territorial possession" in Ireland she ever enjoyed. "Her removal from that land of uneasy sensations to which she owes her birth, was in deference to a duty sanctified by God and man, and paramount to all others—it was at the desire of one, who had left his own great and happy country for the adoption of hers, and for the sake of that cause to which for more than a quarter of a century he devoted his time, his fortune, his talents, and his prime of life; it was after the battle of Catholic Emancipation had been "fought and won," and the great league formed for its consummation was broken up, and dispersed, that he became desirous to return 'to die at home at last," (alas!) and where he placed his solitary survivor, she hopes to pass the scanty fragment of life still reserved to her, without reproach, as without the consciousness of deserving it."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

Publication of "Dramatic Scenes," and "Woman and her Master."—"The Book without a Name"—Lady Morgan in Heidelberg and Baden Baden.—Letters from Sir C. and Lady Morgan.—Unpublished Lines by Horace Smith.—Death of Sir C. Morgan.—How to rear Young Ladies.—Table talk of Lady Morgan.—Death of Lady Clarke.—Republication of Lady Morgan's early works.—She again befriends the Poor.—Cardinal Wiseman.—The Battle of the Chairs.—Salvator Rosa.—Lady Morgan lends out her services as Hostess.—Popularity of her Boudoir.—She makes her Will.—Impromptu lines by Lady Morgan.—Her address to "the Athenæum."—More Table Talk.—Prostrated by Bronchitis.—Publication of "Passages from my Autobiography."—Poetical Address to Lady Morgan's Respirator.—Death and Funeral of Lady Morgan.—Westmacott's Monument to her memory.—The Great Moral of Her Life.

IRELAND, as Lady Morgan tells us, was her earliest inspiration and her theme, and it would seem that from the moment she left its shores, her *cacoethes scribendi* flagged. Our authoress's next performance was a work entitled "Dramatic Scenes from Real Life," which Chambers' Cyclopædia of English Literature pronounces "very poor in matter, and affected in style." In 1840, however, Lady Morgan brought her long train of creative literary efforts to a singularly beautiful and effective close by the publication of "Woman and her Master." This work had been almost entirely written in Ireland. Lady Morgan's

Digitized by Google

essentially masculine thought and sense, had long evoked the prejudices of certain affected critics who would have preferred a more uniformly feminine style, and selection of subject: but this grand and philosophical history of Woman, in which Lady Morgan came forward as the champion and historian of her sex, effectually silenced further objection.

Indeed this book effected, if possible, a strong reactionary feeling among the ladies. Some were disposed to resent the implied indignity of the title, notwithstanding that the same definition of womankind had been sanctioned by Blackstone, who gravely speaks in his Commentaries of "The Baron and His Woman."

In "Woman and her Master," Lady Morgan has carefully investigated one of the most important branches of social science—the position which woman should occupy in the order and progress of society. Following up the labours of Bentham, Godwin, and Condorcet, Lady Morgan sought, in the records of the past, guidance for the future. "She subjected the pages of History to a vigorous moral analysis; testing their facts with the skill of a critic, and deducing results with the wisdom of a philosopher." It is exceedingly probable Lady Morgan would have continued to a later era this work, which is in fact a History of Woman down to the fall of the Roman Empire, had not almost an utter deprivation of sight soon after obliged the authoress to relinquish her labours. Critically viewed, this book can only be regarded as a splendid fragment. Since the fall of the Roman Empire the condition of woman, by the progress of Christianity, and the Institution of Chivalry, has undergone greater change than in the previous four thousand years; and it is impossible not to experience bitter regret that circumstances did

Digitized by Google

not permit Lady Morgan to work out her grand project to its full extent.

The work opens with an eloquent and an argumentative sketch of the progress of civilization, and the gradual supremacy of mind over brute force. This, Lady Morgan declared, was far from being complete, especially in the respective conditions and relations of the sexes; for, if the social system is still more imperfect as it relates to the "master," it remains much worse with his "slave," woman being "still a thing of sufferance, and not of rights," as in the ignorant infancy of early aggregation when the law of the strongest was the only law acted on. "Even now," she asks, "when supremacy has been transferred from muscle to mind, has that most subtle spirit—that being of most mobile fibre—that most sensitive and apprehensive organization—has *she*, whom God placed to be a mate and a help to man, at the head of his creation, the foundress of nations, the embellisher of races, has she alone been left behind, at the very starting-post of civilisation, while around her all progresses and improves? And is man still 'the Master;' and does he, by a misdirected self-love, still perpetuate her ignorance and her dependance, when her emancipation and improvement are most wanting, as the crowning element of his own happiness?

"If, in the first era of society, woman was the victim of man's physical superiority, she is still, in the last, the subject of laws, in the enactment of which she has had no voice—amenable to the penalties of a code, from which she derives but little protection. While man, in his first crude attempts at jurisprudence, has surrounded the sex with restraints and disabilities, he has left its natural rights unguarded, and its liberty unacknowledged. Merging the very

Digitized by Google

existence of woman in his own, he has allowed her no separate interest, assigned her no independent possessions; 'for,' says the law—the law of man—'the husband is the head of the wife, and all that she has belongs to him.' Even the fruit of her own labour is torn from her, unless she is protected by the solitary blessedness of a derided but innocent celibacy."

The eloquent champion of woman, not content with asserting the moral and intellectual equality of the sexes, absolutely insisted upon female superiority, and among other evidence cited the great case of Adam and Eve as a proof of their social equality, and the mental pre-eminence of the first Mother, whose very name signifies in the Hebrew, *Life*, while the translation of *Adam* is—*Red Earth!*

In dismissing the subject of "Woman and her Master," we may add, as a postscriptum, that the "Quarterly Review" at last offered to Lady Morgan some honourable atonement by praising her new work with a cordial good will. But had not the editorial control of the "Review" been in the hands of Mr. Lockhart, and not Mr. Croker, at this period, another savage onslaught would doubtless have been made upon her. By turning to Volume XLVI, p. 375, it may be perceived that "Woman and her Master" is pronounced to be "a very clever and amusing work." There can be no doubt, that although not avowed, Sir Charles Morgan contributed to this voluminous disquisition much of his metaphysical and philosophical lore.

The last joint production of this devoted pair was "The Book without a Name;" but it cannot be well regarded as embodying much new mental effort, being exclusively composed of final gleanings from the portfolios of the writers, and stray papers which

Digitized by Google

had previously appeared in the magazines. An excellent copperplate portrait of Sir C. Morgan was prefixed to this work.

In the autumn of 1841, Sir Charles and Lady Morgan made their last continental tour. A long, and hitherto unpublished letter addressed to one of Lady Morgan's nieces, affords a faithful record of their wanderings on this occasion. The writing is extremely illegible, and but too plainly bears evidence of the author's rapidly failing sight. The italics in the following letter are according to the original. Lady Morgan never lost an absurd girlish habit of perpetually underlining words already sufficiently expressive, and which stand in need of no especial emphasis. Two graphic pictures of the Conversation-Haus, and La Source at Baden, surmount Lady Morgan's letter.

"Baden Baden, August 22nd, 1841.

"Well *here* we are, and *this 'here'* is a sort of paradise, half way between *heaven and earth,* a sort of celestial *pendant* to purgatory, which lies *'tother way.* We left poor dear Kissingen with regret and pleasant souvenirs on Monday 16th at six in the morning, after such a levee the day before, with my *general health* much improved, but with the remains of my unlucky cold still hanging about me. We proceeded per *'lohn kutchee'* (job coach) to the ancient city of Wurtzburg where we got dinner (three o'clock). Oh, such a noble *still life piece of antiquity!* a monument of the grandeur of the sovereign Bishops of Germany, in their palmy state. The corners of the streets are guarded by gigantic statues of saints and bishops, and a saint or a Madonna holds *watch and ward* over the fine old sculptured portals of its houses! The palace of the former

Digitized by Google

Prince Bishop, surpasses anything I ever saw in the same genre. It contains three hundred and forty-six rooms, we went through ninety-two! The state rooms vast and splendid, and clean and bright, as if inhabited yesterday—the walls sculptured, marble or *mirrors covered with gold net-work,* or velvet draped with gold or the finest old tapestry, the sofas and beds of the same precious material, many of the chairs and tables of massive silver, and then the cabinets and candelebra, and the portraits of the brave old ——* for three centuries back, and all this silent, solemn, empty! occupied only by the custode who shewed it to us, and by the sentinels who paced along its magnificent halls and galleries; the fatigue *almost* killed me. Wurtzburg *now* belongs to the King of Bavaria since the treaty of Luneville, but he never resides there! From Wurtzburg and Heidelberg, we made a slow up hill journey of *two days;* our *sleeping post* would take a volume to describe—our coachman (we took our calèche all the way) could speak nothing but German, neither could any one in the *mountain inn,* which we did not reach till long after dark; such a landlady, so jolly and tipsy a frau, and boors drinking *a l'ostade* in the adjoining room, and singing *glees in part* and admirably—the *enormous* hostess came and sat with us, putting *her elbows on the table,* in great delight with us, while D—— and Anne lighted a fire and made some of our own *London chocolate,* which saved my life, for each of us slept in a *box* with a *feather bed over* us, and were off before daylight for the prettiest village and the nicest *inn and breakfast* to be had in the Duchy of Baden—no words can give you an idea of the beauty, fertility or *wanton*

* Word omitted.—Ed.

Digitized by Google

plenty of the scenery through which we passed. The background, vineyards, orchards, corn fields, every *species of vegetables* of the *finest description,* and images of pastoral prosperity and loveliness; everywhere the women doing all the most *laborious work,* but, all *prospering.* The valley of the Necker surpasses in beauty *anything* I ever saw in Italy, and to the situation of Heidelberg and its *ruined castle, nothing I ever read,* or saw in *pictures* did the least justice. We arrived to dine there on Wednesday, and stayed Thursday to visit its *wondrous castle,* and to rest my poor weary little frame; and on Friday started *after* breakfast at six in the morning, for this *enchanted place, eighteen hours* journey, for we did not get *here till past ten,* after all, but losing our way and risking being benighted amidst woods and heath. At half *past six that* evening,* Morgan and I were seated on an old stump of *a tree* in front of *the post house* on the *cross roads* to Radstadt, Strasbourg and Baden, while the horses fed and the servants were devouring apples, plums, and walnuts which they gathered along the road, for *in our journey of eight days,* the whole way was studded with teeming fruit trees. We set up here at the Hotel d'Angleterre, and dined yesterday at its *sumptuous table-d'hote,* such a great change from poor dear little Kissingen—such a multitude of fine men! all in *such full dress,* Princes, Counts, Barons, (and *I suppose blacklegs*) and oh! such a variety of beards of all *cuts and colours, such pictures!* We found Miss Mars (?) (the bride) and her very nice husband Mr. E——, seated opposite to us, and there *we are all* in the *frontispiece* taking coffee, while the *band is*

* "Pray tell us what you were all about at that hour and evening, as we were all talking of you, and wishing to know.

Digitized by Google

playing, and the *rooms lighting up* for a bal paré where the Jenkins' want us to go with them, here we found them—by the by, I hear Eugenie C—— has made *a great hit!* Lord C——, a charming elderly gentleman so rich! I must stop as my heart beats.—S. M."

The remainder of the sheet is in the autograph of Sir Charles Morgan:

"Well dear alls, here we are *post-tot naufragia*—after all our adventures of which I suppose, Sydney has given you an account. I wish to heavens we had you *all with us* 'baby' S—— and all. You cannot conceive the beauty of this place; we have got into a little suite of apartments, with a back of wood, and a stream whose 'murmurs invite one to fish, close under our windows; we literally do not see our house, yet we are in the heart of the town, with the promenade and assembly-house within half a stone's throw, and our table-d'hote nearer! We are in fact in the 'English garden,' which is a regular English Park, but more dressed, ornamented, and varied than any I know, what, too, is better still, out of ear shot of all Tory politics; I have seen, however, 'the Sun,' with the account of Lord Morpeth's intended dinner, and regret more than I can say, not being one amongst them. Pray my dear S—— do whatever is right for me, subscribe, if need be, and make some communication of my desire to have been present. Had I been in England, I would have gone to Dublin express. Good God! that Ireland is to be removed from the care of such a man to be subjugated to the lash of Stanley. It cannot, however, last. The heavens themselves war against the Tories! but through what a sea of misery

Digitized by Google

must England navigate, to arrive at anything like government! we can hardly hope to get a letter from you here, but pray write if possible by return of post, and direct to us *aux soins de* Mr. B—— Bad Ems, Nassau. He will keep your letter till we meet, thus saving at least four days post; as far as I can judge by the papers, the Tories are by no means satisfied with their prospects, and I do not wonder at it. What are the dissenting parsons to do? will they not help forward the corn question famously? There is nothing like fanaticism to beat down fanaticism. Truth has no such chance. I was glad to see Clarke's name at the meeting: I must, however, end my share of this letter, I give my love to all in George's Street, and accept it, yourself with my avuncular benediction for the young giant. Ever affectionately yours,

"C. MORGAN."

Lady Morgan adds in a postscript:

"The B —— are still at Ems. As we are going down the Rhine this day fortnight, we mean to stop a day with them, and I trust, find a letter from you, but say *nothing* against nobody. She *never fails* to enquire about your confinement and baby! nor to send her love and *felicitations* which I *always* forget to tell you.

"I will write to dear mamma soon, I hope she is off for the Jones, and that she will be with us in September. You never saw such a scene as when I wrote my name in the *Librairie* Publique *yesterday*—God bless you all!

"S. MORGAN."

Sir Charles and Lady Morgan returned from their pleasant tour with renewed vigour of mind and body.

Digitized by Google

Their evening receptions were at once resumed with increased sparkle and success. Their guests included nearly every person of hereditary or personal distinction. His Imperial Majesty, the present Emperor of the French was a constant visitor. "His mind," said Lady Morgan in conversation with a friend, "seemed to be always laden heavily, and working strongly. He would fall into frequent reveries, and I remarked that whenever a knock came to the door he always started strangely."

Until prostrated by the decline of his mental and bodily strength, Horace Smith continued to be a frequent and delighted guest of Lady Morgan's. The following characteristic epistle from Mr. Smith to her ladyship has been placed at our disposal. It is interesting to trace in its lines the resurrectional flashes of that genius which thirty years before, surprised the public in "The Rejected Addresses." The poem is now published for the first time.

To Lady Morgan.

O dear Lady Morgan, this pain in the organ
Of sound, that the doctors call Larynx,
Is a terrible baulk to my walk and my talk,
While my pen its extremity ne'er inks.

All this I don't mind, but one pang lurks behind,
Nay, it sticks in my gizzard and kidney,
Tho' I know it's not sage, I'm transported with rage,
'Cause I can't be transported to *Sydney!*

When my daughters come back from your dwelling, alack!
What lots of facetiæ they *can* tell us!
While I, within clutch of a feast I can't touch,
Am condemned to the tortures of Tantalus.

When last you came here, *you* had illness severe,
Now *I* must call in the physician;
We would meet, but the more we're disposed (what a bore!)
The greater's our indisposition.

Digitized by Google

O Morgans and Fate! do not bother my pate
With this *Fata Morgana* probations,
If ye can't make me well, rob Sir Charles of his spell,
And his spouse of her rare fascinations.

HORATIO SMITH.

(*Ægrotus*).

On August 28th, 1843, Sir Charles Morgan was summoned suddenly to Eternity. To the latest hour of his life he had continued his liberal and philanthropic labours by voice and pen. On the day of his funeral the "New Monthly Magazine" for September was published; and with many a sigh, and a moistened eye, people recognised in its pages an earnest, able, and hearty contribution from Sir Charles Morgan's pen, attesting the indomitable perseverance with which, to the last gasp of his existence, he had toiled in a generous cause. By his family and private friends, Sir Charles was beloved with an affection which time may mellow, but can never obliterate. Several earnest tributes to his worth appeared in the journals of the day. One in the "Examiner," probably from the pen of Fonblanque, we transcribe: "a writer of great ability, an honest politician, an amiable and most enlightened man, he has claims to be long regretted by a wide circle of every class of opinion. While his mind kept equal pace with the progress of liberal views, his tastes were formed and resolutely fixed in what we call the best old school. He was never at a loss for the witty or the wise passage from Rabelais or Bayle. We turn to his last magazine paper—published as we write this—and find it closed with a quotation from the latter writer: 'Ne croyez pas que je me vante de n'avoir rien dit que de vrai : je ne garantie que mon intention, et non pas mon ignorance.' And truly if anything but the exactest truth ever

fell from himself, it was ignorance, and not intention that betrayed him. The one most rare with him—the other most certain, reliable and sound."

Sir Charles Morgan's death was quite unexpected, even by the eminent physicians, Latham and Chambers, who had been in professional attendance on him. He was, to all appearances, recovering from an attack of fever, when apoplexy suddenly occurred. This domestic bereavement proved a severe blow to Lady Morgan. But the condolences and attentions of her compatriots—young and old—served in some degree to alleviate it. Many were the expressions of homage tendered to her who had lived to be a classic. "The children and children's children," she said, "of my partial readers and earliest friends, are now extending the sphere of my social existence which death has narrowed, solacing by their sympathy the unceasing consciousness of losses which can never be repaired; and cheering with their bright looks of kindness that dreary hearth from which all the deeper affections, and profounder associations are now for ever estranged." It must have been consolatory to Lady Morgan to reflect that it was owing to a perfect congeniality of disposition and taste on her part, and a true reciprocation of all attentions and endearments that Sir Charles always enjoyed the happiest of homes.

To the generality of readers it is hardly necessary to say that Sir Charles had no children by Lady Morgan. Had she been a mother she would have proved a fond and a wise one. Her principles for the education of youth, were sound. In a *tête-à-tête* conversation with Mrs. Hall, on the subject of some young ladies who had been suddenly bereft of fortune, Lady Morgan said, with an emphatic wave of her dear old green fan, "They do everything that

Digitized by Google

is fashionable—*imperfectly;* their singing, and drawing, and dancing, and languages amount to nothing. They were educated to marry, and had there been time they might have gone off *with,* and hereafter *from,* husbands. They cannot earn their own salt; they do not even know how to dress themselves. I desire to give *every* girl, no matter her rank, a trade—a *profession* if the word pleases you better; cultivate what is necessary in the position she is born to; cultivate all things in moderation, but *one* thing to *perfection,* no matter what it is, for which she has a talent—drawing, music, embroidery, housekeeping even; give her a staff to lay hold of, let her feel '*this* will carry me through life without dependence.' I was independent at fourteen, and never went in debt."

After such a sound bit of teaching, she would, if a *superfine* lady was announced, tack round to her small vanities, ply her fan after a new fashion, and exclaim with such droll pretty affectation, "Why were not you here last night? I had two Dukes, the beautiful Mrs. P—— (never mind, the scandal is nearly worn out) the young countess who is so like the lady in *Comus*—the Indian Prince, who dresses the corner of a room so superbly, and is everything we could desire except *fragrant.* I am a liberal, but really since the Reform Bill, have ceased to count M.P's. as gentlemen, still they are M.P's., I had seven—certainly of the best men—*en route* to the Division. I told you two dukes and one duchess; but the delight was a new and handsome American, a member of Congress—I dare say he exchanged his Bible for a Peerage, the moment he landed at Liverpool! You should have seen his ecstacy when presented to a duchess, and how he luxuriated beneath the shadow of the strawberry leaves."

Digitized by Google

On April 24th, 1845, Lady Morgan was deprived by death of her only sister, Lady Clarke. To this amiable and accomplished woman she had long been ardently attached by a double link of domestic love. As the senior of Olivia Clarke by ten years, Lady Morgan regarded her from infancy with feelings of mingled maternal fondness and sisterly affection. Little Olivia was but two years old when Mrs. Owenson died; and the elder sister was called upon to take a mother's place at an age when the joyous office of a playmate would have sat far more naturally upon her. With what sad feelings Lady Morgan heard of her sister's death may be gathered, when we know that their love grew with their years, and that, so far back as 1801 it had reached a point of intense warmth. In Sydney Owenson's first book —the poems elsewhere noticed—we find an address to Olivia which records conclusive evidence on the subject. The authoress, having mentioned the interesting fact that she had been from childhood writing, and ere she "well could write, inditing," exclaims:

"What! and no lines to thee addrest,
Thou longest known, and loved the best,
Not one to thee:
For whom I've oft wept, sighed, and smil'd
My sister, mother, friend and child,
Thou all to me!

Alas! I ne'er could learn the art
To write from head and not from heart.

* * * *

Associate of my infant plays.
Companion of my happiest days,
With whom I ran youth's frolic maze:
With whom I sung
My first untutor'd artless lay,
And on whose sportive accents gay,
I fondly hung!

Digitized by Google

Sweet friend, too, of my riper years,
Who kindly shares my hopes, my fears,
My joys, my sorrows, smiles, and tears,
My nights—my days:
With whom I share one heart, one mind,
My more than kin, and more than kind
How sing thy praise?

* * * *

Still those gay visions fancy brought,
Were with thy loved idea fraught,
With you to live I fondly thought
With you to die:
Nor e'en with life to part with you,
For in my heavens Utopia too,
I placed you high!"

Charles Wentworth Dilke in recording Lady Clarke's death, said: "No person was better fitted to grace and adorn society; light-hearted, brilliant, full to overflowing with animal spirits she was sure to be welcomed there, yet the wife and the mother was content to shine in a narrower sphere, to do the drudging duties of life, and to gladden with her good spirits her own family and fireside. In a sentence, she was a high-spirited and true-hearted woman. The last time that we had the pleasure to be in her company, we formed part of a circle whom she entertained with snatches of old Irish songs, and others, more familiar, out of the 'Beggar's Opera.' Little did we then think that one so cheerful, and so full of life was suffering, as we now know, from a disease which was so soon to terminate fatally." Lady Clarke had reached the age of sixty. She is interred at Irishtown, near Dublin, in the same grave with Robert Owenson.

Lady Morgan bore up against her domestic bereavements with that vigorous philosophy which through life had been a speciality with her. If a circumstance occurred to annoy her, she endeavoured

Digitized by Google

to forget it in the excitement of frolic. From this period until an evening or two before her death, she entertained, at reception or ball, an uninterrupted succession of distinguished and pleasant guests. On November 28th, 1846 she writes: "My dear Mr. C——I am in despair. If it is possible, pray come and dine with me at six o'clock. You will make a fourth with three dancers. One of her Majesty's Maids of Honour, and Lady Laura Tollmasche," &c. "Do, darling," she would sometimes say to Mr. Hepworth Dixon, "do, darling, come and dine with me to-day, and you shall have a countess all to yourself." Mr. Jeafferson, in his Memoirs of the Novelists, says: "Her house is frequented by the most distinguished men of letters and leading personages in the world of fashion, and it is rare for a stranger of any note to visit our shores and quit them without having sought an introduction to the author of 'Woman and her Master.'"

In 1846, Mr. Colburn made a liberal offer to Lady Morgan for liberty to republish her early works in a cheap and popular form. Referring to this circumstance, the authoress said, "I have lived long enough to be once more the proprietor of some of my earliest productions, and thus as it were to become my own posterity—the only posterity, haply, I may ever reach."

To the new edition of "The Wild Irish Girl," Lady Morgan prefixed some new and interesting introductory remarks.

"A first book, like a first love, is generally a thing to be a little ashamed of, a juvenile indiscretion, (more pleasant in its passage than in its retrospect): and in the attempt of the Editor of the present edition of 'The Wild Irish Girl' to correct its incorrigible errors of style, the author of 'Woman and her Master' has often

the same doubt of personal identity, which the ill-used mistress of the wicked "little dog Stout," expressed in the well-known stanza of,

"'Oh, quoth the little woman, sure this be none of I.'

"The doubt of identity, however, applies only to the overcharged style, and exaggerated and very youthful opinions, scattered over the work of one who loved Ireland not always 'wisely,' and sometimes, perhaps, 'too well:' for Ireland, like a fair, frail woman, more flattered than served, has suffered as much from the homage of her admirers as from the calumnies of her foes.

"Still the spirit and the sympathy, and above all the earnestness of purpose and desire to serve, which urged this first instalment of a very small capital of talent, paid into the account of her country's wrongs, remain undiminished."

Lady Morgan had devoted a considerable portion of leisure, during this year to the task of revising her "Wild Irish Girl," with a view to republication in one volume. Parental fondness cannot be said to have blinded her to its defects, for she considered and avowed that the book contained many "incorrigible" errors of style. But Lady Morgan did less than justice to her "Wild Irish Girl." In a note to a very beautiful local description she writes, "'young ladies' castles 'always *frown*,'—the cross things." Byron, however, has stamped the phrase with the high authority of his sanction. One cannot forget the stately stanza commencing

"The castled crag of Drachenfels
Frowns o'er the wide and winding Rhine."

During the autumn of 1850, we find Lady Morgan rusticating at Shirenewton, Rectory near Chepstow,

Digitized by Google

Monmouthshire, the residence of her niece's husband the Rev. Inwood Jones. As Lady Morgan was never indifferent to the claims and wants of her toiling and suffering fellow-creatures, she, observing that they laboured under great local difficulty in procuring water during that sultry season, originated a plan for the erection of a public fountain, and headed the subscription list by a generous draught from her own purse. The good project succeeded, and a most convenient fountain now stands in the village bearing a record of her benevolence. There can be little doubt that had any other person proposed the plan it would have been received with apathy, and soon have fallen into abeyance. To Lady Morgan's tact, the present health, and comfort of the people of Shirenewton, is entirely owing. A copy of her appeal to the wealthier inhabitants is before us.

"Of all the wants," she writes "incidental to mankind there is none more pressing than the want of water—of pure, good, wholesome water—food cannot be prepared without it, and through the medium of food it becomes part of our blood, and acts upon our bodies. Corrupt and bad water is a slow poison—it is full of living matter, which breeds disease, and is peculiarly hurtful to women and children, who, it is grievous to say, are generally the only water drinkers in a family.

"Water is more especially needful for all the purposes of cleanliness, on which health, comfort, order, and propriety depend; a free use of it is the best preventative against vermin, and to the neglect of its use, fever, cholera and scrofula are owing. In ancient times, plague and pestilence were the result of dirt and slovenliness, arising out of want of water, where springs were few and distant. The

Digitized by Google

chief impediments to obtaining water by the poor and the industrious are the remoteness of natural springs, and the want of means for procuring rain water. The men of country villages are engaged in daily labour for the support of their families—the women who are able to work, are occupied in earning something abroad, if they can, or attending to their infants or families, if at home—the labour, therefore, of drawing water from distant wells, falls upon either the very young or the very old, and almost always upon the females.

"A little girl despatched for water with a heavy earthen pitcher of some gallons may often be seen toiling up our hills and over a rough road, sometimes poising her pitcher on her head—sometimes resting it on her hip, distorted out of its socket to support the weight so much beyond her strength, and thus, most probably, laying the foundation of two dreadful diseases, decrepitude and water on the brain. Another equally piteous sight is the aged woman with her two heavy cans of water, balancing each other, as she toils along, frequently obliged to stop by the way, in her heavy exhaustion—and when these small quantities of the great element of life and health have been obtained for general use, how inadequate are they for the daily purposes of life! to cleanse the human body, to wash the clothes and household furniture, and, last of all, and most essential, to dress the food, and afford drink to the thirsty and exhausted—the springs from which they are brought, though pure in themselves, are too often polluted by all sorts of filthy deposits, animal and vegetable, and the father of the family is thereby prevented, perhaps after a long day's work, from quenching his thirst and refreshing his strength by the most natural, but now uninviting element, and

Digitized by Google

turns to the more exciting refreshment supplied at the neighbouring ale-house, at a price that would procure his family a comfortable meal—and thus he acquires habits of inebriety, unfitting him for the social duties of life, and rendering him too often careless of his own and reckless of the lives of others.

"To forward a moral reformation as well as provide for a natural want—It is proposed:

"To turn a spring, which now flows unprofitably under the soil we tread on, to the account of health, cleanliness, and utility—to erect an iron pump in the centre of the village of Shirenewton—and to defray the expense by a general subscription of all the householders in the immediate neighbourhood of the spot, it being distinctly understood that any, who decline to subscribe to so necessary a work, will not be entitled to the benefit of it."

It gratified Lady Morgan to find that she was not altogether forgotten by her own country. Visits, presents, and letters from Ireland, were always received by her with a hearty *cead mille a failthe.* On her return to London, she found a presentation copy of the "Macaria Excidium," published by the Celtic Society, and immensely enriched by the editorial labours of John Cornelius O'Callaghan. One of the few copies at his disposal, he presented to Lady Morgan, who, on November 13th, 1850, thus acknowledged it, although her sight was now almost utterly gone. "Lady Morgan begs to return Mr. O'Callaghan her best thanks for the very interesting work he has so ably edited. Her absence from London for the last four months prevented her making an earlier acknowledgment. She is sure she will derive much pleasure and instruction from a work so peculiarly adapted to her own taste, as *she* also

Digitized by Google

fancies herself '*the laste taste in life,*' of an Irish antiquarian."

Notwithstanding the skill and attention of the best ophthalmists of London, Lady Morgan's sight far from improved, and for a considerable time she did not put pen to paper; at last, a flash of the old genius attracted public attention. After long repose Lady Morgan donned her glittering armour, and entered the lists of controversy with no less a personage than Cardinal Wiseman. The matter is curious not only in a literary point of view, but as shewing the unquenched spirit, and undiminished powers of argument of the all but blind octogenarian. This being the last act of Lady Morgan's literary life, we shall examine, at some length, the various points of the controversy.

In her great work on Italy, Lady Morgan professed to describe, among other relics, the Chair of St. Peter at Rome. Most people know that it has remained for a considerable period concealed within a shrine. Lady Morgan reported that the "sacrilegious curiosity" of the French, removed its superb casket, and having explored the relic, traced upon its mouldering surface an Arabic inscription declaring that "there is but one God, and Mahomet is his Prophet." Lady Morgan advanced it as her opinion, that this chair had been among the spoils of the Crusades offered to the Church, "at a time when a taste for antiquarian lore, and the deciphering of inscriptions were not yet in fashion. The story," she added, "has been since hushed up, the chair replaced, and none but the unhallowed remember the fact, and none but the audacious repeat it."

Cardinal Wiseman, during his residence at Rome, heard of this startling charge, and at once took its confutation in hand. As a zealous Catholic eccle-

Digitized by Google

siastic, he felt naturally indignant that the relic so long venerated in the Vatican Basilic, as St. Peter's Chair, should be pronounced to be a mere Mohammedan monument, and that the clergy having discovered this, should have continued to deceive the people, by directing their respect towards an object which they knew to be not only spurious, but absolutely bearing an inscription denying the truth of Christianity. Cardinal Wiseman declared that he could easily produce the attestation of those who had been in the service of St. Peter's Church, since a period antecedent to the French Revolution, to the fact that the seals of the relic had never been violated; but he forebore to do so, as it might be said that the men who could deceive the public in the impious manner alleged, would have little scruple in giving any testimony necessary to countenance the cheat. Cardinal Wiseman argued, therefore, on other grounds. He shewed, with great learning, that this relic existed long before the Crusades, or even Mahomet himself. From historical, the Cardinal appealed to circumstantial evidence. "No one," he said, "doubts the identity of the coronation chair of our kings of England with that of Edward the Confessor, simply from the fact that it has ever been preserved in Westminster Abbey for that purpose. The same tradition exists in favour of St. Peter's Chair." Cardinal Wiseman then proceeded to account for the mistake into which Lady Morgan had been led. He explained that in the Church of St. Peter at Venice, has long been preserved a stone chair called by the populace "The Chair of St. Peter." The back of this chair was adorned with a rich Cufic inscription which the learned Assemani desired Cornaro to decipher for his work. Cornaro, in a dissertation published in 1787, clearly proves the inscription to be Mohammedan,

Digitized by Google

and composed of several verses of the Koran. Cardinal Wiseman used several phrases in conducting this "rebutting case," which gave offence to Lady Morgan. "Here then," he concluded, "we have laid open the origin of Lady Morgan's foolish and wicked tale; the story was repeated to her ladyship: she deemed it too well suited to her purposes of misrepresentation to merit examination, and gave it to the public with all the assurance which points, and all the levity which wings the worst shafts of calumny. There is something truly profligate in her waste of human character, whether we consider her assassinating private reputations, by personal anecdote, or cutting down whole classes of men as in the instance we have been confuting."

Lady Morgan read the confutation, but was not convinced by it. She addressed to the Cardinal a portly pamphlet in reply which ran through five editions.

"It is possible," she wrote, "that among your Eminence's *Caudatorii* (or trainbearers) there may be some one literary and clerical genius fired with the ambition to edite *your* works, when I shall be no longer living to defend *mine*, and who may hand me down to posterity (my only chance) marked with the *cachet* of your Eminence's reprobation. Self-defence is the first law of nature, common to all created things

"'That live and move, and have a being,'

and I am sure your Eminence will approve as a man, as a gentleman, and as a Christian, even of a woman availing herself of the great immunity, and bringing her poor reasoning instincts to bear upon an attack made against her by so potent and illustrious an opponent.

Digitized by Google

"And now, my Lord, to the charge. You open your 'Remarks' thus:—'Lady Morgan was originally known to the public as a writer of romance. So long as she persevered in that character, she had a right to *invent* amusing tales to gratify the curiosity of her readers: yet even the regions of fiction are subject to the great laws of justice and good faith; nor can that writer hope for indulgence, who, under the disguise of a fabulous narrative, conceals an attack upon the reputation and character of others.'

"My Lord, I agree to every point of your observation; but I beg to pause *here*. My romances *were not*, as you assert, '*invented* merely to amuse and gratify the curiosity of my readers.' They were written *for* and *in* the great cause of Catholic Emancipation—the theme and inspiration of my early authorship, and the conviction of my after-life. The titles of these books were Irish and Catholic. 'The Wild Irish Girl,' 'O'Donnel,' 'Florence Macarthy,' 'The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys,' &c.,—these were not names, as we say in Ireland, 'to open a Church Pew with.'"

And she goes on to assure the Cardinal that her heroes were Irish patriots, and her models of pastoral piety—Irish priests. Of her political labours in Ireland, through the medium of those "Romances" which the Cardinal had referred to slightingly, Lady Morgan said, that "like the nibbling of the mouse at the lion's net, she had assisted to set the noble creature free."

"My Lord," she went on to say, "I thank you for the indulgence with which your Eminence offers me the benefit of this 'ignorant mistake,' (and never did the Church grant a more gratuitous one!) but I decline profiting by it. My 'foolish and wicked story of the chair' was no mistake—of mine at least.

Digitized by Google

It was related to me and accepted in the most implicit faith, on the authority of two of the greatest travellers, antiquarians, and virtuosi of their age, who were of that illustrious corps of Savans, the friends and companions in peace, and the intellectual staff in war, of the Emperor Napoleon—Denon and Champollion. The night before our departure from Paris for Italy, on our first, last, and memorable visit, many distinguished—I may say illustrious—men were assembled in our drawing-room in the Rue de Helder. Every one was offering an opinion as to objects most worthy of our notice,—when the Baron Denon, who, in one of the happiest phases of the most brilliant *raconteur* of his time, had been describing his visit to the Inquisition, when he accompanied Buonaparte into Spain, and when, satiated with the rueful relics, which that awful place revealed to his antiquarian curiosity, he fell asleep on the table of that terrible Hall of Council, where he actually passed the night —then related the anecdote of the discovery of the Chair of St. Peter, adding, 'The inscription was in a cufic character, that puzzled even Champollion and the most learned Arabic scholars of the Institut.' And thus, 'I told the tale as it was told me,' carelessly and fearlessly, which has drawn down on my work the anathema of your Eminence's 'Remarks on Lady Morgan's Statements *regarding* St. Peter's Chair.'"

This pamphlet contained a considerable quantity of ingenious special pleading.

"But is it *probable*, my Lord, that St. Peter, the humble fisherman of Galilee, permitted himself to be seated or carried in this gorgeous chair, on the shoulders of slaves, as his successor Pio Nono does at this day?—he who had so recently heard his Divine Master declare that 'foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man hath not where

Digitized by Google

to lay his head,'—he, to whose Eastern habits such a chair must have been repugnant! who had taught, not *ex cathedrâ*, but, like the Master he served, walking or reclining on the lap of earth?"

Apropos of this, a learned Orientalist declared that Denon's account of the Chair would be, if true, extremely curious, as the Mahometans never used chairs at all.

Some persons objected that Cardinal Wiseman's "Refutation" appeared somewhat tardily. Its appearance in 1849, however, was a mere reprint. In the "Catholic Magazine" for May, 1831, an article of hostility towards Lady Morgan on the subject of St. Peter's Chair, signed N. W., and accompanied by a rude wood-cut, may be found.

Lady Morgan's eye-sight was not much improved by this troublesome controversy with Cardinal Wiseman. The curious out-of-the-way Latin works which she carefully examined, and adroitly quoted with a view to sustain her in the wordy conflict, could never have been accessible to any other woman but herself. The acquaintance with Ecclesiastical Black-letter tomes, displayed by Lady Morgan in this pamphlet, was striking.

Lady Morgan's eyes enjoyed undisturbed repose from this date, save when an application reached the veteran authoress for her autograph; and requests of this character, she was always too amiable and too vain to refuse. Authors' "autographs" are, in general, stately looking signatures, remarkable for nothing but hair-strokes, down strokes, and a flourish. But whenever Lady Morgan furnished her autograph "by desire," she contrived to infuse into it a dash of that quaint and unctuous wit which had so long been a speciality with her. We transcribe one as a specimen:—

Digitized by Google

"Autograph by desire of W. J. F——., Esq.

"Sydney Morgan, her hand and pen—
She will be good, but God knows when.

"William Street, Albert Gate, 17th May, 1853."

We have said that Lady Morgan had vanity, but it was a vanity so quaint and sparkling, so unlike in its frank honesty, to all other vanities, that it became absolutely a charm. "I am vain," she once said to Mrs. Hall, "but I have a right to be so; look at the number of books I have written!* Have I not been ordered to leave a kingdom, and refused to obey? Did ever woman move in a more false or a brighter sphere, than I do? My dear, I have three invitations to dinner to-day, one from a Duchess, another from a Countess, a third from a diplomatist —I will not tell you who—a very naughty man, who, of course, keeps the best society in London. Now what right have I, my father's daughter, to this? What am I? A pensioned scribbler! yet I am given gifts that queens might covet. Look at that little clock, *that* stood in Marie Antoinette's dressing-room. When the Louvre was pillaged, Denon met a *bonnet rouge* with it in his hand, and took it from him; Denon gave it to me." Then, with a rapid change she added, "Ah! that is a long time ago, though I never refer to dates. Princes and princesses, celebrities of all kinds, have presented me with the souvenirs you see around me, and that would make a wiser woman vain. But do they not shew to advantage, backed by a few yards of red cotton velvet? If ladies did but know the value of that same velvet—know how it throws up, and throws out, and turns the insignificant into the signi-

* Mr. Jeafferson, in his "Memoirs of the Novelists," says that Lady Morgan was the author of seventy volumes.

Digitized by Google

ficant—we should have more effect and less upholstery in our drawing-rooms."

In 1854, Mr. Bryce, the publisher, suggested to Lady Morgan the expediency of reprinting, in one volume for popular reading, the "Life of Salvator Rosa." The veteran authoress dictated to her amanuensis a new preface to the book, which has all the pith, point and animation of her best productions. Prefixed to this new edition is a handsome copper-plate portrait of Salvator Rosa, from the original picture in the possession of the Marquis of Westminster. We subjoin the Preface.

"Did Salvator live now, one might fancy him joining the ranks of the gallant defenders of national independence and civilization; standing out, like one of his own bold figures, upon the heights of Balaklava, pencil in hand and revolver in belt, realizing for the homage of posterity, the grand battle raging below, till, borne away by his kindling sympathies, he flings down his pencil, and plunging into the *mêlée* meets a glorious death, or shares a not less glorious victory.

"With respect to the authorship of the 'Life of Salvator Rosa,' it was written *con amore* in the prime of the author's life, and of her enthusiasm for Italy. Of the principle which animates it, time has not 'bated one jot' nor quenched one sympathy. The style in which it was written may now, perhaps, be deemed *rococo*, by the censors of the modern free-and-easy school, who write that those who *run* may *read*. Such as it is, however, it was the style with which the author won her spurs, under the command of Field Marshal 'O'Donnel,' and other heroes, native and foreign, who championed to their utmost the sublime cause of right and their country's independence. If, however,

Digitized by Google

with the conceit of other veterans, she now "shoulders her crutch, and shews how fields were won," she pleads that she served, though only as a subaltern, in times of the greatest literary enterprise and mental competitorship that British genius ever produced since the Augustan ages of Elizabeth and Anne!"

"To the week of her death," writes one of Lady Morgan's friends, "she continued to give receptions every night regularly—even Sunday—with plenty of chat and coffee. The house was not large, and it was nightly crammed with body and brain. Lady Morgan used to glide about throwing incendiary sparks of wit into every *blasé* and inert group; though almost blind, she seemed always *au courant* with the progress of Literature; and every new book underwent oral criticism, in a style peculiar to herself. Her house was a complete repository of curious articles of vertu, antiques, historical relics, autographs, and other memorials seldom revealed to the world. I was one night reclining in a *fauteuil*, when Lady Morgan glided up to me, saying, 'You may be glad to know, Mr. ——, that the seat you are sitting on, was Horace Walpole's study chair. I bought it myself at the sale at Strawberry Hill'"

"Everything in these rooms," observes Mrs. Hall, "was artistic, and when filled, you might have imagined yourself in the presence of Madame de Genlis, feeling that after the passing away of that small form which enshrined so much vitality, and so large and expansive a mind, the last link between us and the Aikins, the Barbaulds—the D'Arblays, would be gone."

It would be difficult to name a hostess more popular than Lady Morgan. She possessed not only the art of pleasing, but of making every guest infinitely

Digitized by Google

pleased with himself. Her cornucopia of frank and pleasant compliments were dispensed in every corner of that crowded room. Not long before her death, a distinguished peer solicited Lady Morgan to do the honours of a large reception and *soirée,* which some ladies had jokingly urged him to give. The veteran authoress eagerly embraced the novel proposal, and the *élite* of London still look back on that memorable evening as the pleasantest ball of the season.

Although an ardent votary of life and fashion, Lady Morgan did not forget that "in the midst of life we are in death." In 1854 she drew up her "last will and testament," wherein she appointed as executors Mr. Charles Wentworth Dilke, junior, Mr. Duncan Macgregor, and her niece, Mrs. Sydney Jones. Her personality, she declared, amounted to a sum between fifteen and sixteen thousand pounds. This property she bequeathed to her two nieces, Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Edward Geale, and to her nephew by marriage, Mr. Marmion Savage. Lady Morgan also left specific bequests—chiefly pictures—as mementos to several of the nobility who were her distinguished and much-valued patrons; amongst them the Duke of Wellington, the Marquis of Normanby, the Earl of Carlisle, Countess Beauchamp, Viscountess Combermere, and Viscountess Dungarvan. The bust in marble of herself, taken in 1830 by a French sculptor, d'Angers, she directed her executors to present to one of the public galleries. We trust that the executors may yet present it to the Royal Dublin Society with the same generosity that induced them, in February 1860, to place Lady Morgan's portrait, by Berthen, in the New National Gallery of Ireland.

In 1858, Lady Morgan drew up a new will or codicil, making some alteration in the bequest of

Digitized by Google

her voluminous manuscripts. She had formed, in the interval, a warm friendship for Mr. Hepworth Dixon, editor of the "Athenæum," whom she pronounced to be the only real patron she had ever had. Mr. Wentworth Dilke was also named by her Ladyship as co-literary executor. In making this change, Lady Morgan took the precaution of writing "cancelled" over the condemned will; but as she neglected to do so in the presence of witnesses, some litigation on the subject has since been the result.

"The world thought her vain and worldly," writes her niece, "but I must pay this tribute to her memory, by remarking that she denied herself many luxuries that her old age and infirmity might have entitled her to, in order to preserve for us intact, by economy and self-abnegation, the produce of her industry."

It has often been remarked that Lady Morgan's powers of conversation baffle all description. "Her unbounded, unfading, unfailing freshness of memory," observes a newspaper writer in 1855, "her liveliness of description, her inexhaustible wealth of anecdote, the readiness of repartee, the variety of humour, the pliability of wit, the occasional richness and *abandon* of fun, the great faculty of adjusting herself to all moods; of drawing out all minds, the sovereign gift of making everybody pleased with himself, pleased with everybody else, and above all things, pleased with the amiable *raconteuse* herself—such is the charm which makes Lady Morgan's boudoir the pleasantest afternoon or evening rendezvous of London to all who have privilege of admission."

It is impossible not to be forcibly struck by the contrast of personal feeling and emotion which marked the early and the later days of Lady Morgan's existence. The morning of her life—usually

Digitized by Google

a season of joy—was clouded by care and deluged in tears. They were not "sun-shining showers," over in a few moments, but dark, dense, and dreary. Let the reader glance back at pp. 63, 75, 82, 83, 89, 90, and he will find some chance records of this long and gloomy era of care. But other evidence abundantly exists. In the year 1800, for instance, she feelingly refers to—

> "The griefs with which my later life has teem'd;
> The loss of golden hopes I fondly dream'd,
> Of glittering expectations past away,
> As sun-ting'd vapours of a summer day!"

And are not the concluding expressions of uncertainty, as the authoress vainly endeavours to explore the womb of time, particularly touching and interesting?—

> "What sweet and sad extremes I'm doom'd to know
> From bliss ecstatic to corrosive woe;
> Obscur'd, conceal'd, my future prospects lie,
> Nor more I know than that I'm born to die."

Some of Lady Morgan's myriad foes were wont, among other calumnies, to accuse her of insincerity. The fact is, however, that her literary ability was only surpassed by the strength and fidelity of her friendships. "There is," writes one of Lady Morgan's former guests, "no instance of any of her friends or acquaintances being at any time set aside, disregarded, or overlooked. The memory of the heart was with her particularly strong and retentive. However intended to shine in wide circles, Lady Morgan was never so engaging as in *petit comité;* however gracefully at ease amongst the highest, however all alive amongst the highest, she was never so perfectly at home as amongst her friends. Her wit and humour were never so ir-

Digitized by Google

resistible as when blended with natural and generous outbursts of feeling."

Among her friends and guests was an accomplished lady, Miss de S——s. On her marriage, in 1856, Lady Morgan sent her a cambric-worked eider-down pillow, lined with rose-coloured satin, and accompanied with the following impromptu lines which are now published for the first time:

"While friendship and love their rich tributes combine,
To adorn your fair person, and gay, bridal shrine,
With gems, jewels, and trinkets, tiaras and rings,
Albums, prayer-books, *bon-bons*, and other good things,
With caskets all glittering in velvet and gold,
And *pur coq de perle*, these treasures to hold,
While some sorry swain brings his typical willow—
May *I* humbly offer my eider-down pillow;
Be it typical, too, of a life of repose,
All flowery and downy, and *couleur de rose*."

The remarkable constitutional pertinacity with which Lady Morgan retained, even after she had become an octogenarian, all her pristine vivacity, and power of fascination, was pleasingly noticed by the "Athenæum" a month or two previous to our author's death. The vigilant editor of that influential journal would seem to have regarded Lady Morgan in her green old age, as a dear old evergreen which had sustained many a storm, and which it behoved him, in his capacity of pruner and cultivator in the garden of literature, to encourage occasionally by acts of generous and thoughtful attention. "As she then sang," observed the "Athenæum," "she still sings. Some harps seem never worn and never out of tune. The chords obey her hands, as in the former day, throbbing as she flings across them eloquent and sprightly music. This faculty of liveliness, and bantering good humour, is strange, as it is admirable in one whose long life has been, so to say, a

Digitized by Google

succession of siege and storm. In her youthful time, Lady Morgan was less a woman of the pen than a patriot and a partizan. Her books were battles. 'The Wild Irish Girl' was her Marengo—'France' her Rivoli—'Florence M'Carthy,' her Austerlitz—'Italy,' her Borodino. She underwent no Leipsic or Waterloo—the last calamity of noble minds—yet she must have suffered from the hail of shot and shell. Through more years than we care to say, her name was as signs among the combatants, her voice sounded as a trumpet through Whig and Tory camps, and a new book from her hand drummed a host of enemies and friends to arms. She wrote, too, in an age when, to be a woman, was to be without defence, and to be a patriot, was to be a criminal. Yet her spirits seem to preserve themselves into a mild old age; joyous as though her stream of life had run between green and flowery banks—graceful and noiseless—her girlhood, a romantic dream—her womanhood a prophetic care, blessed and crowned with that diadem of peace which the wise man covets for the daughter of his love." Knowing that the gods themselves are old, but forgetting that the Muses are always young, the "Athenæum," in reviewing her Diary, observed that, "Lady Morgan had lived through the love, admiration, and malignity of three generations of men, and was, in short, a literary Ninon, and seemed as brisk and captivating in the year 1859, as when George was Prince, and the author of Kate Kearney divided the laureatship of society and song with Tom Moore." Lady Morgan viewed this kind courtesy with mingled feelings. She felt grateful and flattered by the applause of the "Athenæum;" but she did not altogether like to be reminded of her advanced age, or that those over whom she still exercised a strange witchery of fascina-

Digitized by Google

tion should be informed of it. Under the influence of these feelings she addressed to her reviewer the following lines, which strikingly exhibit her vigour of thought to the last:—

"My life is not dated by years,
For time has drawn lightly his plough,
And they say scarce a furrow appears
To reveal what I ne'er will avow.

Till the spirit is quenched, still a glow
Will fall o'er the dream of my days,
And brighten the hours as they flow
In the sun-set of memory's rays.

For as long as we feel we enjoy,
And the heart sets all dates at defiance,
And forgetful of life's last alloy,
With Time makes a holy alliance.

Then talk not to me of "my age,"
I appeal from the phrase to the fact,
That I'm told in your own brilliant page
I'm still young in fun, fancy, and tact."*

SYDNEY MORGAN.

* Since the appearance of these lines in "The Friends, Foes and Adventures of Lady Morgan," we received a letter from a popular author, loudly crying "Stop Thief!" against her ladyship, for having "committed a plagiarism on Byron." He cites from the noble bard:—

"My life is not dated by years,
There are moments which act as a plough
And there is not a furrow appears
But is deep in my soul as my brow."

Our correspondent goes on to say: "On the same page of Byron's works from which I quote, occur these lines on youth and age.

"*Oh talk not to me* of a name great in story,
The days of our youth are the days of our glory."

There is, however, something so frank and undisguised in the adaptation, that we are inclined to think Lady Morgan fully in-

Digitized by Google

Lady Morgan was, indeed, pre-eminent in "fun and tact." If a friend complimented her on her looking so much better, she would reply, "perhaps I am better rouged than usual; what am I after all but an old Almanack with a new title?" A lady who was wont to indulge in insincere smiles of benignity, once said, "Dear Lady Morgan, how lovely your hair is—how do you preserve its colour?" "By dyeing it, my dear, I see you want the receipt." Lady Morgan disliked to be cross-questioned about her writings, and recoiled from the topic as "shoppy." A certain pompous lady of the pen, who frequently questioned Lady Morgan as to what she was doing, and where she got her "facts," asked one evening, when Miladi was very brilliant and entertaining, her authority for some fact in "Italy." Twisting her large green fan, and flashing upon the querist the full blaze of her lustrous eyes, she replied, "We all imagine our facts, you know—and then happily forget them; it is to be hoped our readers do the same."

Sir Emerson Tennent observes that the examples we have given, recall vividly the sparkling energy of Lady Morgan's conversation. "The last occasion," proceeds Sir Emerson, "of our having Lady Morgan at our house a few months before her decease, I could not but congratulate her on the vigorous health which she was then enjoying, and she rejoined by saying, 'she believed that we might all live just as long as we liked—and that, in fact, she looked upon any one that would die under a hundred as a suicide!'" *

tended her verses to be viewed as an ingenious parody on the beautiful lines of Byron. This is the more likely, as Byron's lines are serious and sentimental, while Lady Morgan's are humorous and playful.—W. J. F.

* Letter from Sir J. Emerson Tennent, Sept. 12, 1859.

Digitized by Google

Ill health came at last. In May, 1858, Lady Morgan was completely prostrated by a virulent attack of bronchitis—a disease which had, in the previous November, consigned her brother-in-law, Sir Arthur Clarke, to the grave. No hope was entertained of Lady Morgan's recovery for many days; but an unexpected rally, attributable, in a great degree, to her own patience and tranquillity of mind, enabled the fair octogenarian to cheat death for the nonce. Undaunted by his near approach, she promptly availed herself of convalescence to resume her old and brilliant position as queen of a sparkling coterie. But she did not devote her new spell of health and intellectual vigour to conversation exclusively. With the aid of Miss Jewsbury, as amanuensis, she arranged for publication a volume of her Diary and Correspondence, extending from August 1818, to May 1819. This period, as the reader may remember, was spent by Lady Morgan in London and Paris, in preparation for her visit to, and great work on, Italy. These "Passages from my Autobiography," which were published by Mr. Bentley, in January, 1859, possessed some traces of the fault by which Moore's Memoirs and Diary were disfigured, namely, a too obviously intense enjoyment of fashionable celebrity and society, and the same excessive desire for aristocratic praise and recognition. The book contains several amusing passages, but, on the whole, wants depth and sentiment.

Poor Lady Morgan's health was ricketty from this date. Night air, or a damp atmosphere, rarely failed to tell severely on her constitution. She was ordered by her medical adviser to wear a respirator—an appendage which she, by no means, enjoyed. Her chief dislike to it arose from the fact that it

Digitized by Google

completely padlocked conversation. Yet unpoetical in its object and unpleasing in its associations, as this medicinal invention must be considered, we find it furnishing a happy vein of inspiration to one of Lady Morgan's friends. The lines now appear for the first time.

TO A RESPIRATOR INTENDED FOR THE USE OF SYDNEY, LADY MORGAN.

As Pagans guard the temples which enshrine,
Their fondly worshipped idols, deemed divine,
As one entrusted with a jewel rare,
Preserves its casket with attentive care,
As anxious misers watch their treasured wealth,
Watch thou, the treasure of thy lady's health.
A precious trust, fulfill thy duty well,
Unkindly frosts, and wintry winds repel,
Preserve the casket where a jewel lies,
Which long has charmed, whose brightness still we prize,
Guard well the honoured temple where enshrined
Worth, wit, and genius form a woman's mind.

"The last time we saw the 'Wild Irish Girl,'" observes Mrs. Hall, "she was seated on a couch in her bed-room, as pretty and picturesque a ruin of old lady womankind, as ever we looked upon; her black silk dressing-gown fell round her *petite* form, which seemed so fragile that we feared to see her move. We recalled to memory Maria Edgeworth, having believed her to be the smallest great woman in the world, but Lady Morgan seemed not half her size. Yet her head looked as noble as ever; the lines of her face had deepened, but her large luminous eyes were bright and glistening, her voice was clear and firm, her manner subdued—she was not at all restless, but spoke with confidence of arranging her autobiography, of which she had sent forth a little portion as an *avant courier*. She shewed us a large black trunk which she told us had, when she married, con-

Digitized by Google

tained her *trousseau*—'during the happy interregnum between hoops and crinolines,'—and now was filled with manuscript; she spoke with affection of the dear relative, 'who never suffered her to feel that she was childless,' of her devoted servants (and they certainly deserved her praise) and of the kindness of her friends. She gave voice to one or two little sarcasms that shewed her acuteness was undimmed; but the hour flew swiftly and harmoniously; we promised to come some evening soon, and rejoiced her maid by saying that though her ladyship was changed, she looked much better than we expected. We heard, what we know to be the case, that Lady Morgan during her illness, and indeed, always to her servants, was the most patient and gentle of mistresses. An unamiable woman could not have been beloved, as she was, by all around her."

Poor Lady Morgan did not long survive the publication of her "Odd Volume," as she herself styled it on the fly-leaf. She passed tranquilly into eternity on April 14th, 1859, aged eighty-four, and with her became extinct the last illustration of high Whig society belonging to the world of Byron, Rogers, and Moore.

"Life was so strong," observed the 'Athenæum,' in recording her death, "and spirits were so brilliant in the woman of genius who departed from among us only a few hours since,—enjoyment of society was so keen with her to the last,—habit of expression so eloquent,—and life and spirits and expression kept such perfect pace with the interests of the day, the changes of the hour,—that while recording the death of Lady Morgan we feel something of sudden surprise, besides much of personal regret." The timid tendency to shrink from fashionable society which marked the early life of Sydney Owenson, is

Digitized by Google

exceedingly curious when contrasted with the passionate affection for it with which Lady Morgan's days closed. In 1799 the tiny girl, addressing her solitary bower, writes—

> "Oft from th' unmeaning crowd I'd fly,
> From fashion's vapid circle hie,
> And beneath thy umbrage sought
> The luxury of pensive thought."

But although an ardent votary of fashion in the noon and evening of her life, Lady Morgan was keenly alive to the solemnity of death, and to the unseemliness of a fashionable cortège at her funeral. "Let no such ghastly mockery accompany my poor remains to their last resting place," she said; "I desire that my funeral may be strictly private, and limited to a hearse and one mourning coach."

On Tuesday morning, April 19th, 1859, a coffin hardly larger than an infant child's, was lowered into the clay of old Brompton cemetery; and to that historical grave many an Irish pilgrim will yet wander to gaze upon the storied slab* of

Sydney Lady Morgan.

This Life preaches a moral, but it is a moral different from that which the panegyrists of Lady Morgan have hitherto sought to inculcate.

Lady Morgan was not, as has been asserted, in Chambers' Cyclopædia of English Literature, "a self-educated person." On the contrary, she received,

* The memorial consists of a flat slab, supported by six pillars; below is a block of polished white marble, on which is inscribed "Sydney Lady Morgan," with the date of her death. The time of her birth is not mentioned. Above the inscription is an ancient Irish harp resting on two volumes, on one of which is written "Irish Girl," on the other "France." The tomb is backed by the dark foliage of Polish firs, which adds much to the effect. Westmacott is the designer of Lady Morgan's tomb.

Digitized by Google

as we have shown, no stint of schooling—so much that it absolutely disgusted her. Her early writings in themselves, smell of the hot atmosphere of the school-room: we feel ourselves sitting upon a hard form as we read; and the ring of the pedagogue's birch more than once grates upon our ear. Sydney Owenson's acquaintance with foreign languages, and familiarity with English classical literature, is apparent to the very verge of pedantry in her first works, and shows, that the education of the authoress had been carefully attended to. The moral, therefore, is not, that by energetic self-culture in later life she tore from her mind the myriad cobwebs which alleged intellectual neglect, extending over many early years, had created; but the lesson which her life teaches is based on the great fact, that with her own fragile female hand she parried undauntedly the assaults of a furious and organised host of Critic-Cut-Throats, and finally hurled them, one by one, to the ground, where the teeth that had been sharpened to gnaw this brilliant woman's heart, impotently bit the dust beneath her feet. Self-reliance and self-respect, without the support of which no genius can be secure or genuine, formed a prominent feature in her idiosyncracy. Those who are in fear of falling do nothing but stumble; and impressed by the truth of the aphorism Sydney Lady Morgan, with queen-like dignity and confidence, pursued the opposite course boldly. The blows aimed at her own fair fame she made recoil upon her assailants. The finest poetic genius that had ever shone on the world had been already quenched prematurely by the deadly grasp of John Wilson Croker; a violent attack in the Quarterly Review, killed poor unresisting Keats. An unadorned slab, in the Churchyard of St. Werburgh, Dublin, com-

Digitized by Google

municates to the reader the melancholy fact, that Edwin, one of the most promising Irish actors, died in 1805, from a broken heart caused by an illiberal criticism in Croker's "Familiar Epistles on the Irish Stage." "There is nothing so detestable," says Addison, "in the eyes of all good men, as defamation or satire aimed at particular persons. It deserves the utmost detestation of all who have either the love of their country or the honour of their religion at heart. I have not scrupled to rank those who deal in these pernicious arts of writing, with the murderer and assassin. Every honest man sets as high a value upon his good name as upon life itself; and I cannot but think that those who privily assault the one, could destroy the other, might they do it with the same security and impunity." To virulent criticism the brilliant Montesquieu also fell an unresisting victim. Aristotle, accused by critics of ignorance and vanity, poisoned himself. Cummyns declared, shortly before his death, that some ill-natured criticisms were hurrying him to eternity. Hereclitus, persecuted by his countrymen, retired in disgust from the world. Anaxandrides, dreading hostile criticism, burned his dramas. Racine died of extreme sensibility to a rebuke, and exclaimed that one severe criticism outweighed all the gratification which the concentrated praise of his admirers could produce. The melancholy death of Dr. Hawkesworth is attributed to a similar circumstance. Marsham burnt the second part of his valuable "Chronology" because some flippant critics assailed the first. Bentley succumbed to the jealous cavils of Conyer Middleton, and abandoned the publication of his best book. Pelisson records the death of a promising young tragic author from the effects of L'Etoile's criticism. Ritson went mad from critical

Digitized by Google

persecution, and died under the hallucination that scribes surrounded his death-bed armed with weapons for his destruction. The learned Abbé Cassagne also went mad and died from a stroke of Boileau's literary lightning. Scott of Amwell never recovered from a ludicrous criticism. Batteux became a prey to excessive grief. Newton suffered from the malignant jealousy of Leibnitz and others, and abandoned the publication of a valuable work on Optics in consequence of cavils. Innumerable instances might be cited to shew the number of brilliant minds who in all ages have weakly succumbed to the poisoned shafts of ambushed antagonism. What a vast amount of valuable literary and scientific achievement, have been thus lost irrecoverably to the world! We do not deprecate adverse criticism when offered fairly and conscientiously; but we detest to see it made the vehicle of malignant assault from private or party motives, as was the case with the majority of the examples we have cited. Had Sydney Morgan bared that heart which blazed with pure patriotism, to the dastard stab, and submitted her dead body to be trampled upon, as Aristotle, Racine, Hawkesworth, Ritson, Cassagne, Montesquieu, and Keats, submitted and were trampled, this memoir would have had but an inferior moral to dignify it. That brilliant woman, however, grappled with the arm which sought to destroy her fair reputation, and possibly her life, and like the good fairy crushing the Evil Genius in a Pantomime, she smote the arch-Foe to the earth, and placed her tiny foot, cased in white satin, upon his ponderous coat of mail!

THE END.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BIBLIOTECA CENTRAL
98-8º
973

12º
D 166019

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google